

Externship Journal Ireland: Arts, Land, People

L10: Can reflect on the learning process and methods used in an experiential project.

L11: Can use reflective observation to describe and evaluate the significance of Irish Castles.

Introduction

The following Externship Journal depicts the trials and tribulations that were encountered on one of the most incredible experiences of my life. Consider, going on an International travel study course for twelve days with no prior knowledge of the subject you are about to study. Combine that with meeting thirteen of your fellow classmates, most of them sharing the same fears as you and you have a story of a lifetime to tell. This journal cannot do justice to describing the new skills I obtained while in Ireland, but I hope you get a feel of the process that I went through. Much can be said about learning by doing, which is my preferred style as defined by the Kolb theory of learning. I had no idea how much value I would gain by just observing and listening to others.

What is your learning style, as shown by the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory? Give at least three examples of how you can see that you have used your Learning Style effectively. These examples can be from school, work, or personal life. What are the strengths you see in this kind of learning?

My learning style is defined as “*Converging*” which combines the learning steps of Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation. To understand the magnitude of my learning style requires an understanding of the scores in each of the quadrants. My “*kite*” as it is commonly referred, is heavily concentrated in the Active Experimentation (AE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) grids. My scores of 42 in AE and 37 in AC, one can see that I really enjoy diving into the facts to solve a problem.

Project management skills are used every day in my job. I am usually working with at least ten projects at any one time. This requires a persistent use of time management skills combined with very detailed actions plans and action steps to ensure the project stays on budget and is completed within the required timeframe.

I have an accounting background and I tend to look at problem solving from a black and white perspective. I have always been very detail oriented and enjoy the technical aspects of solving day to day problems. Some have said that I am so organized you can open up my desk drawer and find my paper clips all lined up in order. I am not that bad, but I think it gives you a pretty good idea of what they are talking about. I tend to try and get too much information to make decisions with and I tend to take a little longer in my decision making process. This is because I want more information and then when I get it I want even more. Procrastination comes easily to me. I don't understand why I wait to write papers for school, some say it is because I enjoy working under pressure and I usually get the job done. But, this usually takes a toll on my mind and body as I get really stressed out as every day goes by.

As I have learned over the first couple days here in Ireland as we discussed the four learning styles, this procrastination is a common trait of "*Divergers*". I also scored high enough to almost be an "*Assimilator*". I really enjoy organizing information and making "To Do" lists. Analyzing data comes very easy to me and I enjoy immersing myself in spreadsheets and management reports. There are so many other aspects of the skills that I use from my learning style and I would like to discuss three examples of such.

The first example of how I have used my learning style effectively is when I had to make the decision on which software application to purchase for Bank Secrecy Act compliance at my company. In order to select which software would be the best, I needed to construct the pros and cons with the strengths and weaknesses to narrow down the best choice. This pre planning requires piling through loads of details to ensure that the proposal is “apples to apples” and no one proposal is biased. I am usually working with risk matrices to develop a scoring system that will allow management to make the correct choice. If I am wrong in my analysis, it may cost the company thousands of dollars.

The second example of how I have used my learning style effectively is when I was in Foundations Class at the School of New Learning. Foundations Class is a very labor intensive process that covered a lot of information in a short amount of time. Because of the fast paced nature of the course, it suited my learning style very well. I did not have a lot of time to do research. It required me to stay on task of the outline that was developed and make quick decisions. I really enjoyed working in this manner as I am a task oriented person and really enjoy crossing off items that needed to get done. Get one thing done and move on to the next one not having to think a lot about alternatives. I do not know how a “*Diverger*” accomplished this intensive class without feeling totally overwhelmed.

The third example of how I have used my learning style effectively is the use of the skills in AC to effectively develop our company’s strategic plan. Strategic planning is a systematic process in which goals are set based upon an internal analysis of the company’s strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) and an external analysis of its

opportunities (O) and threats (T). The SWOT analysis is examined, and action plans with goals are created to take advantage of or overcome any of the items on the list. This type of work is exactly what a “*Converging*” learning style is suited for. Detailed planning that creates actions steps, budgets and goals is the basis of the plan.

One of the greatest benefits of going back and revisiting the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory when I originally completed it in 2005 is I now have a better understanding of what I need to do to be a more effective learner. Building on the strengths of the other learning styles is something that I will continue to work on. My goal before I leave is to gain a better understanding of each learning style and use each one of them in different aspects of me writing papers. I know I can do a better job at that and will look for ideas to strengthen my skills.

What subject will you be exploring while in Ireland? What do you already know about that subject? Describe your expectations of what you will learn. What fears and/or hopes do you have for this part of the learning journey?

My topic of interest is “Irish Castles” and while I find this area very fascinating, I have no knowledge on this subject. That is what is so exciting about picking this subject. I really enjoyed history in high school and I look forward to doing the research that will teach me the origins of Castles in Ireland and the uniqueness they possess. There is so much to learn about my subject. I have no idea where to begin in determining how to best organize my thoughts. With so much information that I am sure will be available to me, how do I ensure that I do not spend so much time researching that I put myself behind in meeting the deadline for submitting my Advanced Elective. My learning style would be to find a couple of quick references and begin writing. I need to learn how to do more extensive research and prepare an outline to begin my

rough draft. This is very difficult for me to do. I know there are better ways to begin the writing process and I am looking for guidance from my classmates that can help me. After several conversations I have learned that writing is best accomplished after setting certain times of the day aside to stay on track. I usually get writers block and have a hard time figuring out what to say. Developing new learning styles during this experience is really exciting because I have so many ILP's to write in my Focus Area. This has given me the momentum to go back and finish them up. I have started rough drafts on all of them but stopped because I really didn't understand the process. I now have a better understanding how my preferred learning style is holding me back in my writing skills.

I had originally planned on picking Gaelic Football but decided to go outside my comfort zone as I am a huge sports fan and it would have been very easy to stay along this same line of thinking. Even though I had no understanding of that subject either, I just felt that I would have a different learning experience picking a subject that will force me to seek knowledge in an area that will reveal a lot interesting stories along the way. I can strike up a conversation with anyone regarding sports. I know sports very well as I have played them growing up and have a real passion for it. Speaking of passion, I need to apply this same intensity to Irish Castles in order for me to get over my fear of talking with someone that I have no knowledge of the subject.

Some of the expectations of what I expect to learn are, why were Castles built the way they were? What were they made of and were there plans or were they constructed over time and upgraded as they found better ways of doing things. The architecture is amazing and I would like to learn the engineering in behind them. Are

there differences in them between regions and how long did it take to build one. I cannot imagine living back in this era and I am fascinated with the historical significance of how they were bought and sold over the years. I would like to immerse myself back in time and try to understand how the Irish people lived. What was the motivation behind the decision to build where they did? Was it purely a strategic military move or were there other mitigating factors such as the ability to get food.

One of the biggest fears I have while I move forward in my learning in Ireland is that I do not do well in new environments. I like the routine that I have been accustomed to and when I deter from that I feel some anxiety. I hope that everyone else in the group has some of the same feelings and I can learn from them on how they overcome this. I enjoy meeting new people and I look forward to learning more about how each one of my fellow students can help me along the way. Learning something new has always been fun for me. I don't consider myself very knowledgeable of other cultures and customs so this part of the learning journey is exciting. Getting to travel to this beautiful country is an experience that cannot be taught from a book and I will memories of this trip that will last a lifetime. I cannot wait to share it with my coworkers, friends and family. I probably won't do it justice but will try and convey all of the information that I will be getting over the next eleven days. Let the journey begin.

Select another learning style, preferably that “opposite” from your preferred learning style on the Kolb cycle. Write your reactions to the idea of learning in a way different from your normal learning style. What fears and concerns do you feel? What benefits can you imagine from learning in this new way?

At the opposite end of my preferred learning style are the “*Divergers*”. Divergers tend to look at situations from many different perspectives. This learning style has

many skills and traits that make me a little uncomfortable. As I try and understand the strengths of this learning style, I am reminded why I like to create plans and make decisive decisions. I do not like sitting around “brainstorming”. Listening with an open mind is not a great strength of mine. I tend to base my own opinions on what has worked for me in the past. I do not like working in groups. I like working on my own with finance applications. The human element of having meetings and working in groups does not interest me. I want to get right into the project and start solving the problem. To me, brainstorming is a waste of time. I could be working on the project right now. I have seen too many meetings that go astray from the original problem because there was no ground rules established from the beginning. But on the other hand, I do see that by slowing down and listening to others it would improve my decision making ability.

Some additional fears that I have is that if I try and use the strengths of this learning style, I may not get my writing done. If I have to spend a lot of time thinking in a broad sense, I will not narrow my focus and ask the right questions. Meeting deadlines is very important to me. Even though I procrastinate I understand the time sensitivity to getting the work done. Although I should know better by now, I cannot help thinking that if I spent a little more time looking at my writing from various perspectives I would gain knowledge that I would not have otherwise. As an example, I wrote an ILP several weeks ago and when I turned it in I received feedback from my Professional Advisor that said I should incorporate more peer related journal articles. Well, I felt that I had already put in enough work in this area, but when I went back and did some further searching in the DePaul libraries I came across two more articles that I

gleaned a lot of information from. In other words, broadening my research taught me that there are other points of view and not to jump to conclusions based upon only one or two quantitative examples.

Asking questions in a group setting are always awkward for me. I have a hard time asking the right questions when I need to interview someone. Having the ability to concentrate on the human side of issues is something I would very much like to learn. I need to put myself in these situations more often to practice the techniques that this learning style excels in. I wonder if I don't use this learning style much has to do with being an online student. It is very difficult to ask questions and expect to get immediate feedback. It is just easier for me to go off on my own and get the answers. Being an online student is difficult because you do not have the luxury of sitting in a classroom environment with the ability to have a strong oral dialogue with classmates and professors. This new learning style will be difficult for me while I am here. I want to get out of my comfort zone. I just do not know how to go about doing it.

One of the benefits that I can see myself gaining by looking at the Diverging learning style is that I will gain a better appreciation of the impact of decisions that I make on people. Sometimes I lose sight of the role this plays when tough decisions are impacting employees. I tend to think in terms of the economic gains or losses rather than the impact on employees. One of my biggest fears around this is that if I try and put too much emphasis on this I will lose sight of the technical aspects in the decision making process. Overlooking the quantitative aspects of situations must be maintained in order to ensure that sometimes the perfect decision will never be made by a Diverger. The emotional impact in the decision making process is something that I can use in

strengthening my interpersonal skills. Listening with an open mind will help establish a rapport with people and will encourage them to come to me for problems as they will feel that I have a genuine interest in them. I have had supervisors at other employer's that were not good listeners and it really intimidated me to not go in and talk with them.

As a Converger I tend to be very active with quite a few projects going on at the same time. I could be well served to take the time to listen to others' ideas. By doing so, I am not relegated to my first line of thinking. Not all of the projects that I work on are of a technical nature. But, I do apply the same concepts in my preferred learning style to them. One of the greatest benefits that I can learn from the Diverging learning style is gathering information.

Looking over the Arts Week program and around the town, design at least four learning experiences for yourself that are related to your topic of interest and that use your new learning style. For instance, a Converger trying to become a Diverger and studying dance would talk to different people and listen to varying ways of viewing dance, without judging the content of the comments but being open to all.

There are not a lot of activities or programs around town that pertain to my topic of interest. I am fearful that most of the activities around the Clifden Arts Festival are related to art, music, poetry, etc. and I won't find enough new learning opportunities to pursue. It doesn't mean that I won't have any opportunities to pursue my new learning style, because one of the great things about this town is everyone is so friendly and I shouldn't have a problem striking up a conversation with the locals and asking questions. I have noticed that most everyone enjoys talking about this great country of theirs. Sharing some stories with them will be fun as well as educational. I just hope I can ask the right questions. This is not one of my strengths and it will take some practice learning how to do this.

The first learning experience that I have planned is I see that on the schedule that the class will be touring Aughnanure Castle on Monday. Even though the tour will only last about an hour, I am excited about the opportunity to speak with the tour guide to get an understanding of these magnificent architectural structures. I will also plan to just mill around looking for other tourists or groups that will be in the Castle that I could ask questions of. When I ask my questions I will try and engage the person to talk more about the answer they give and try and find out more information that will help me with other research on this topic. My first inclination is too just take the answer and not dive into it more by thinking about other ideas. I will also try and pick up as much literature as possible so I can do further research when I get home. Now that I have a better understanding of the Advanced Elective I will look at other ways of finding the information to address the Arts and Humanities portion of the project. By taking the time to talk to others at the Castle will definitely take me out of my comfort zone but I now understand the importance of it.

The second learning experience I plan on doing is to go to several book stores in Clifden to start my Research. I am not much of a reader of books, but I do enjoy going into a book store and looking around. You might be thinking that is really strange, and I do agree. Why do I like looking around and exploring, but when it comes time to sitting down and reading a book, I find it very difficult to do? Can I learn something about myself during this externship journey that will help me become a better reader? I certainly hope so. Maybe I will surprise myself and find a couple of books that will be easy to read for me. I might even adventure out and go to the library and spend a little more time than I usually would in a book store. I think it would be fun looking through

older historical records in Ireland. I anticipate the library being much different in Ireland than in the United States. I don't know why I think that but maybe it is because the history goes so far back that there has got to be some very interesting books on my topic of interest. Interviewing the librarian wasn't something that I would even consider doing previous to this course. I would have just gone into the library and wander around until I found something of interest.

The third learning experience I have planned is to do an internet search on the history of Irish Castles. Google is a marvelous tool and I will use it extensively in my search. I will also look into the DePaul Library online to see what peer reviewed journals I can find. I can imagine myself getting lost in all of the hits that I get on the Internet. I am wondering how I will narrow my search. One of the best ways I have found is to be very specific in the search field. Use of the quote signs and the other wildcard features should help me answer most of the questions I will be asking in the arts, sciences and human competence categories. This is the easiest of the learning experiences that I have planned and I am going to save it to last so I give the other experiences the necessary time and commitment to them. It would be very easy to concentrate on this learning experience exclusively, but this is something that I should not fall back on if I am to enhance my learning and determine other methods to gain knowledge in my topic. I think I have had a tendency to rely too much on the Internet in most of my research. Taking a page out of the Divergers playbook, I will attempt to not get bogged down in all the research and fine tune my questions to ensure I am looking for the references that best fit my topic. Another aspect of an Internet search is taking some time and asking the DePaul librarians for help. I have not done this before and I

am hoping that the online learning environment doesn't make it too difficult to do. I will ask some of my fellow classmate if they have had any experience with this and to see if they can offer some tips.

The fourth learning experience I have planned is to take another Castle tour outside of the class itinerary. I had this in mind prior to departing the United States as Krista Swanson made a post on Blackboard that she would like to tag along as well. After we had time as a group to get to know each other, several other classmates decided to come along as well. I thought it was a great idea as we could all learn from each other as we make our way around. In my preferred learning style, I would have normally said no thanks to the offer of having others tag along, as I like to go adventuring on my own. Now that I have had a great experience getting to know my fellow classmates, I have re-thought my plans on the tour and think it would be an excellent way to learn more about Irish Castles. Having others in the group with me might help in brainstorming questions to ask as I am walking around the Castle talking with the staff. Sometimes I think that the only way I am able to learn anything new is to experience it alone. I enjoy being in group settings so I am not sure why I don't want to explore this more often. Maybe it is because I want to discover anything new on my own so I can have a direct reflection on the results. If I am in a group learning experience, others that contribute to that learning often distract me from my own point of view. I need to learn how to keep an open mind with respect to new ideas and explore them. My first thought about touring the castle would have been to just get a taxi on my own and go exploring and that would be it. By doing this, I would miss out on other perspectives by just observing other views rather than acting upon my own.

The fifth learning experience I plan on pursuing is to talk to several of the locals in town and ask them if they know of any documentaries on the history of Irish Castles. This may have to wait until I get back home due to the fact that I am running out of time to complete my other new learning experiences. When I am at the library, I can check in with them to find out if there are any documentaries on Castles. I am sure I will be able to find information by doing more Google searches or by going to specific Television web sites (e.g. History Channel). Not only will I talk to the local patrons of Clifden about documentaries, but it will give me a chance to talk with them about other learning opportunities. I might find out they may have ideas on how to go about finding other research information. For example, by asking about the significance of the Clifden castle it might help me find out more information than just a documentary.

All five learning experiences take me on a path that is not comfortable to me. I will have to work very hard at this if I am to make progress with my new learning style. There are enough opportunities for me to do so. With the help of my fellow classmates, I will learn from them on what works and what doesn't. To summarize the key points of a Diverging learning style I will look to explore are working in group environments, listening with an open mind and relish the opportunity to receive personal feedback. I will take my time in my readings and try and use my imagination to learn more about my topic and I will soak in as much information as possible.

For your next four journal entries, describe the results of the learning experiences you planned and executed. If you alter your planned learning experiences, explain why and how that might reflect on learning patterns (good and bad) that you have used in the past. Describe the learning experience. Then describe how it reflects your new learning style.

The first learning experience that I had planned was to obviously go on the tour of Aughnanure Castle on Monday with the class. At this point I am really excited about the tour and actually getting to see such a historical piece of architecture. The tour of Aughnanure Castle was amazing as well as the entire learning process. I found myself wanting to ask so many questions that I had to pull back from my preferred learning style and just listen to what the tour guide had to say as well as some of the other groups that were there. I mingled among the other tourists and listened to their conversations. I learned so much by just taking my time and not trying to do too much. One of the major objectives of the tour was to set aside some time to interview the tour guide. I had great intentions to do so, but there was another group that came in late and the tour guide decided to match us up with them as well. I was hoping to get a lot more one on one with her. Lucky for me I had a backup plan and brought my digital audio recorder and was able to tape the entire tour. After the tour was over I asked her a couple of follow up questions which gave me some information to back and research later.

The previous Sunday a group of us went to Ballynahinch Castle. Well let me tell you, there was absolutely no comparison between the two. Ballynahinch Castle was a modernized version of a historical hotel. The Castle had been converted and it did not have the exterior appeal that the Aughnanure Castle had. I am glad that we went to Ballynahinch first because I appreciated the tour of Aughnanure Castle so much as I truly felt that I immerge myself into the historical significance of its existence. After seeing the ruins of the Clifden Castle upon return of the tour bus from our trip on Wednesday I decided to go back on my own and do some exploring. I knew I had to do

this from the very minute I saw the ruins. My eyes were immediately drawn to the ruins and I started to ask myself so many questions about the history of this castle. Why did it go to ruins and how did it get to this state. From what I understand there are hundreds of castles in Ireland and many are in this same shape. It is a shame to see these castles in this shape, but I understand that over the years the deterioration from the weather must be taking its toll on them. I will research why some of the castles have been saved and others have not. This is fascinating to me.

The second learning experience I planned on doing was to go to several book stores in Clifden to start my Research. I went into the first bookstore that I saw a couple of days earlier and found a really good book right off the bat. I decided, based upon my new learning style that I should put that book down and continue looking around the store. I am sure glad I did because I found a jackpot of a book. It is a very easy read and covers most of the material that I will need to write my Advanced Elective paper. If I hadn't looked around and only purchased the first book I saw, I would have missed out on finding the book I really needed. I learned that I should take my time when it comes to researching and I will use that in other areas as I start to write my ILP's in my Focus area. I asked the clerk if there were other bookstores in the area that she would recommend and I went out of that store with several other choices to visit. Even though I felt I found the book that I needed, it was still important to me to continue my journey of visiting other bookstores. This was difficult for me. I just knew I had the book I needed and wasn't looking for any other information. The second bookstore I went into did not have a lot of information on Castle's and that frustrated me. I did not want to spend any more time on this planned learning experience but I continued on my trek to find other

resources. I decided that instead of going to another bookstore I would take a walk down to the library. For those that know me would say that I must have been lost as I do not wander into libraries too often. I will have to say, that the experience was fun and educational. This library was very different to the library in my hometown. Some of the books were so old. I loved picking them up and thumbing through them. This has provided me with some motivation to go to the library when I get home. I am so used to doing everything on-line, so I must admit I enjoyed this learning experience very much.

The third learning experience I had planned was to do an internet search on the history of Irish Castles. Since I brought my laptop computer to Ireland, this was one of the easiest learning experiences for me if I would have followed my preferred learning style. Instead of doing an Internet search that I am used to doing, I decided to launch a different search engine to get me out of my normal routine which allowed me to see different searches that I wasn't accustomed to. I decided to make a directory of my searches and make sub-directories within that to help organize my work. I wouldn't normally do this, but learned from listening to some of my classmates that are really good at doing research and compiling information. This will help me in my future writing as I am now starting to figure other uses of developing folders. I was also able to find some good information on some online book sites. One of the ways I used my new learning style was to get on the Internet every night while I was in Ireland and made sure to continue to do searches using various keywords to get as much information as I could on Irish Castles. The classroom environment that we had really helped me with coming up with new information to search on. Every day we would have discussions on what the requirements of Advanced Elective are. This helped me develop some very

useful Internet searching over the course of my trip. Another example of how this was accomplished is I took some suggestions from the classroom discussion on learning styles and discovered that I need to just get as much information as I can and then I can go back and edit that information. Editing is not a strength of mine, and being a Converger and I now understand the importance of this skill.

The fourth learning experience I had planned was to take another Castle tour outside of the class itinerary. While I didn't find another tour to take, I was able to go out and adventure on my own and find a Castle that was in ruins. This gave me a totally different perspective on the aesthetics of how one might feel inside one of these magnificent landmarks. This experience was most rewarding. I had no idea that I would enjoy having some of my fellow classmates tag along with me to discuss what it must have looked like when the Castle was first built. I looked inside the Castle and really enjoyed seeing what some of the different rooms might have looked like. We then got into a conversation about the architecture itself and this gave me some great ideas to use when I start writing my Advanced Elective paper.

The fifth learning experience I had planned on pursuing was to talk to several of the locals in town and ask them if they know of any documentaries on the history of Irish Castles. I had great intentions on doing this but I failed in my attempt to do so. I really think towards the end of this experience I reverted back to my preferred learning style due to wanting to get back home. In the future this has taught me to do a better job understanding the management of my time and not putting off the things that I don't like to do last. If I would have started with this experience first, I am sure I would have gained some valuable information. This was definitely a lesson learned.

Interview someone from the class with your new learning style. What tips does that person have for you that can help you to use the new learning style? What ways does the other student find his/her learning style is helpful? In what circumstances do you think you would find it helpful as well?

In trying to understand the “Diverging” learning style, I decided to interview Mary Ward. She was gracious enough to give me several suggestions on how I can improve upon my new learning style. One of the best tips that she gave me was to not jump to conclusions when doing research. When asking a question, keep an open mind on the subject, read a little about it then see if that jogs your memory on other ideas. I thought that was a great idea as I tend to gravitate to my first inclination on a subject instead of asking further questions. Since brainstorming is a strength of this learning style, I asked Mary how to best go about this. She suggested putting up a bunch of blank chart paper and just start writing whatever is said. Have no ground rules and just let people say what is on their mind. This is an attempt to not stifle creativity which allows for other thoughts to be pursued. Later, the information can be organized into various categories where that information can be discussed in more detail. Tip #2 – gather as much information as you can on your subject. There will be plenty of time to narrow the focus using your Converging learning style. Since this is not a major strength of mine, I will put this tip to good use. Tip #3 – use your imagination when you look at something. Try to look at the problem from multiple perspectives to see if anything new comes out of it. This will get your creative juices flowing and it will help build the storytelling in your head. One of the ways that Mary explained to me is that it helps to have note cards available at all times and then you can jot things down on them when something comes to mind. How many times have you been working on something and wish you would

have written it down so you wouldn't forget it. I know it happens to me a lot. Especially when we lead such busy lives everything seems to run together. Tip #4 – be a good listener. All too often many people tend to only hear what they want after something is said, instead of listening to the entire conversation. This helps build ideas among other participants and sometimes people do not want to interject their thoughts if someone is always dominating the conversation. I have always thought that listening was a good skill of mine, so this tip is something that won't take a lot of work on my part. I enjoy taking the time to sitting down and having a conversation with someone. Listening skills are some of the most important to have when trying to recognize when you are trying to clarify questions. When you are listening to someone speak, there are points which are not clear, you need to ask questions. Ask questions that show the person that you are paying attention and are truly interested in what they are discussing.

Discuss your learning difficulties. What has held you back as a learner? What classes or other learning experiences have you found to be difficult? Is there a better way of adapting your new learning style to make you a better learner?

One of the major learning difficulties that I have had over the years is I do not consider myself a good reader or a good writer. I have always been good in math and science and have pursued these strengths in my career. Going back to school at DePaul has taught me how to improve my skills in these areas. I know I have a long way to go and with practice and patience I will succeed. One of the toughest courses that I have taken at DePaul was Research Seminar. I found it to be extremely difficult trying to understand the requirements of the class. I had never been introduced to the topic of literature reviews and peer reviewed journal articles. The articles themselves were very difficult to read. As I had previously discussed, I am not the greatest reader

and I spent many hours taking the time to try and understand the information embedded in a peer review journal article. As with Research Seminar, most all classes at DePaul involve some major writing project. It takes me forever to find the time to sit down and put my thoughts down on paper. If I am having a conversation about a topic, I can usually come up with a lot of different aspects of that topic. Why can't I put those same thoughts down on paper? I truly believe I have a fear of someone critiquing my work. I just cringe when I turn a paper in and await the outcome of feedback.

I am usually pretty good at receiving constructive criticism at work, so why am I so critical when it comes to my writing? I wasn't a good student in high school English class and I really think it goes way back to my days there that are making my days at DePaul difficult. Looking back, I wish I would have spent more time learning how to write better, but upon reflection, doesn't one normally gravitate to those areas that one excels? That was certainly my case. None of my teachers sat me down (or at least that I remember) and discussed the importance of putting your thoughts down on paper and how useful that would be later on in life.

So, what are some ways of adapting my new learning style that will help me become a better learner? I really feel that I will be much better at gathering information and synthesizing it to produce better quality of work. I have gained some valuable tips from my classmates that excel in this. I've always believed that practice makes perfect and adapting my new learning style is no exception. There will be pain along the way, but as long as I recognize this fact and don't get discouraged I should become a better learner. At the same time, I will not abandon my preferred learning style. After all, I do have a lot of strengths that can be applied to my future knowledge gathering.

Conclusion

This incredible journey has now concluded. I know that this experience has been one of the most satisfying of my entire life. The people that I met are second to none. The entire learning process has been somewhat of a challenge, but I recognize that practice makes perfect and my new learning style will not happen overnight. Some of the best ideas that I came away with occurred when we had a classroom discussion on the various learning styles. The words that are used in the Kolb learning style book can be somewhat confusing. Professor Monaghan taught it in real life terms. Using animal acronyms has really helped me understand the differences in learning styles. I am now going to go back and re-read my book to see if I can pick up some other useful tips.

I also taped the classroom discussions while I was in Ireland and I will be reviewing these audio files as I prepare for my Advanced Elective paper. I find that I comprehend information if I listen to it again. I am not a great note taker. I really enjoyed listening to others in the classroom environment discussing their learning challenges as well. I cannot think of a better way of learning than in a classroom setting. I miss that. Being an online adult learner, you don't get the advantages of a classroom student. Just being able to ask questions and getting immediate feedback has been so beneficial. I wish all of my classes were structured this way. Oh well, I am now back at home, signing on to Blackboard and having online discussions. One thing can be sure, I will always remember this new learning experience and I will apply it moving forward.