

## Finding a Theme in Your Education

The Big Picture: Because you study at an interdisciplinary and liberal arts institution without majors or specific course requirements, you have an important task: to articulate and assume responsibility for your learning (#1 of the Six Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate). It is up to you to show what you found meaningful in your education, what big questions you decided to answer, and what you have emphasized in your studies as well as gained along the way.

Here are some strategies for outlining the process:

1. Brainstorm or free-write to answer the following questions:
  - a. What is education for? What does it mean to you?
  - b. Why are you in college? What do you value? How is it practical? How does it connect with your vision of the future?
2. List the college classes and programs you have taken so far.
3. Start to sketch the connections that you see emerge between the courses and programs. You could draw this as a mind map or write it out. How do programs support learning in other programs?
4. Add concrete details and specific experiences to support the connections that you have made.
5. Narrow down the central questions or themes that have driven your studies.
  - a. If you're a freshman or sophomore, these may just be forming.
  - b. If you're a junior, they should become pretty clear to the point where you might declare an area of emphasis\* (similar to a major at a traditional college).
  - c. If you're a senior, you should see which questions or themes you have explored for a while and how they might serve you once you've graduated.
6. Given your central questions or themes, write about how you plan to further investigate them (especially applicable to the annual draft) or write about how far you have come in your discovery (especially applicable to the final draft) and how you plan to continue.
7. Given that you are at a liberal arts college that expects you to gain breadth as well as depth in your studies, write about the disciplines (natural sciences, social sciences, mathematics and computer science, humanities, or arts) that have complemented your main focus or highlight the intersection of the disciplinary areas.

**\*Area of Emphasis:** Earning 45 or more quarter credits in a field would allow you to call it your area of emphasis, and 32 quarter credits in a field could be considered a minor area of emphasis. Your area of emphasis is not listed on your transcript, but you are allowed to refer to it on resumes, applications, and your Academic Statement. If you have questions about declaring an area of emphasis, visit Academic Advising or the Career Development Center in LIB 2153 or call (360) 867-6312 for an appointment.