

Learning Contract

2011

This document outlines the skills, abilities and targets of the student Dominique Renault. It also describes her background and future plans, indicating how the MA Media scheme contributes towards these.

Dominique
Renault

Contents

Contents

Introduction	3
Aims and Objectives	4
Personal MA Aims.....	4
Personal MA Objectives	4
Career aims	5
Career objectives	5
Background	6
Areas of interest	6
Undergraduate degree.....	6
Employment	6
Research Seminar	10
Conclusion.....	132
References.....	13
Appendix 1: Curriculum Vitae	134

Introduction

A learning contract is an agreement between student, tutor and university about the learning aims and objectives to be achieved through a particular programme of study. It clearly sets out what will be taught and how this will benefit the student, so as to ensure that everyone gets the greatest benefits from the course. Once aware of the student's intentions it may be easier for the tutor to tailor learning, in order to meet the student's specific targets. By setting out expectations and limitations as early as possible the university can ensure they deliver the most relevant and beneficial material to students.

Learning contracts can also be used as a pedagogical tool to provoke the student into consciously thinking about what they hope to benefit from the course, helping them to gain focus. This can assist the student in obtaining the greatest possible profit from their studies. By writing out their goals student are able to reflecting on their current abilities and those they must gain to achieve these goals. Then they can better adapt their study to support any career or personal ambitions.

Aims and Objectives

Personal MA Aims

These are my personal aims for this master's degree. The timeframe for the following aims is until the completion of the course, as they require gradual development. Some of the aims will need continued development beyond the MA.

- To develop academic abilities including research, written, and presentation skills.
- To develop knowledge in areas of media that interested me, including representation and gender issues.

Personal MA Objectives

These are my personal objectives, for what I hope to gain from the masters, and how I hope to gain it. There timeframe for these objectives varies. For the completion of my dissertation there is a clear timeframe, which is within the deadlines set by the degree. This must be completed and handed in by the 7th September 2011.

However some of the other objectives have more flexible deadlines, and may continue to be worked on even after the completion of my course. In fact it is arguable that within academia one is constantly improving skills and this process only ends when the individual ceases to exist.

- To produce a well-researched, thoughtful and interesting dissertation. That also puts forward valuable academic arguments and contributes to the field of study.
- To improve my written skills, so that I can write in a manner that is both informative and entertaining via successful completion of essay based assignments.
- To read widely before producing work, in order to build on my knowledge base.
- To note any interesting text, even if not directly relevant to any current projects.

Career aims

The career aims set out below are closely related to my progress and success on the master's degree. For if I cannot complete my personal MA aims and objectives I will not be able to progress and transfer these skills and abilities to achieve my career aims and objectives.

There is no set timeframe for completion of my aims, and it is hard to set one due to the financial and circumstantial factors surrounding them. However I would like to set a flexible deadline of achievement before I turn thirty, which allows eight years.

- To achieve a high level of academic achievement, including obtaining a PhD and publishing my own academic works in the form of journal articles and a book.
- To achieve professional qualification in the form of a PGCert in Blended learning, in order that I can develop a career in both learning and technology.

Career objectives

Unlike my career aims, my career objectives do have a much stricter time scale. As my career objectives relate directly to the completion of elements of my master's degree then these are set to the same timeframe as my master's, and must be completed by 7th September 2011. However there is some space to explore further after my degree, as long as I have gathered all the necessary information during the course.

- Successfully complete all given assessments and use these as an opportunity to explore and note possible further research for articles and books.
- To obtain an MA Media so as to progress to the next level of study.

Background

Areas of interest

Specific areas of media theory that interest me include representation and gender issues, especially among minority groups. The concept of 'us' versus 'them' and the construction of outsiders and insiders is also of particular interest and an area I intend to carry forward in future research.

Due to my undergraduate degree in journalism, representations within the news media hold special interest. This is also due to that fact that audiences can (and should) trust these sources of information (newspapers, online news and news broadcasts) as factual, accurate and objective. Therefore any prejudice or opinion put forth in these texts (especially when hidden in fact) can influence public perceptions greater than a text they know to be fictional, such as a film or novel.

Undergraduate degree

Subject: Journalism

Qualification: BA (Hons)

Location: Southampton Solent University

Year of graduation: 2010

I opted to do this degree because I had highlighted writing to be my best skill and at the time felt journalism was the most financially stable writing career. I also intended to become a music journalist, as I felt this career would combine two of my areas of interest. However, whilst on the degree I was able to explore other areas both in theory and technical ability.

The areas of theory gave me a good founding for the MA Media degree, and made the transition easier. I was able to expand on my knowledge and explore areas in greater depth. This contributes greatly towards my overall academic development, and ensures I am on the correct track to obtain the end goals of high academic achievement (see page 4 & 5).

Employment

My most recent and current employment is at Southampton Solent University, working within the e-Development Centre (edc). Initially as a Web Content Writer, developing and creating content for the University's various online sites, this helped

to develop both my technical and written skills. This has been beneficial for the MA Media as it has contributed to my background knowledge when creating a website for a Creative Practice Project assessment (see page 8).

However I have recently changed positions and am now working, still within edc but for a sub-department called the Learning Technology Unit. This is a positive step forward as it involves me further into the pedagogical side of the university, and could present the opportunity to obtain a PGCert in Blended Learning. The achievement of this additional qualification could enable me to lecture whilst working on my academic writings.

MA course units

Perspectives on Media Culture

Tutor: Darren Kerr

Period: 1

Credits: 30

Assessments: 20% Seminar presentation (Gender representation in specialist tattoo media)
 20% Seminar report (On approve presentation)
 60% Academic essay (Fandom and the Twilight Saga)

This unit was highly enjoyable and it really focuses in on the areas of theory that I find interesting and engaging. The assessments for this unit were also very relevant to my aims and objectives not only for this MA course but also for my future. The presentation allowed me to explore representation of tattoos, an area which I began exploring in my undergraduate dissertation. It is linked to the general area of representation, which is an area I intend to continue investigating, and writing about after completing the master's degree.

The subject for my academic essay was also of great interest, and is a topic I would consider taking forward to a book. The subject was the reception of the Twilight Saga, and investigating why there are such strong fan base and anti-fan base for the Twilight Saga, looking also at the wider popularity of vampires. I found it beneficial to be able to explore areas, such as fandom and representation that are of interest to me and could turned into academic publications in the future.

Creative Practice Project

Tutor: Russell Richards

Period: 1

Credits: 30

Assessments: 10% Group Presentation
 60% Production (website, as part of other marketing material)
 30% Report

Creative Practice involved working in a group, which is an important skill to develop. The assessment also enabled me to improve my technical skills in Adobe Dream weaver and my ability to use HTML code in order to build a website as part of the assessment. This was a very beneficial experience as it contributed towards securing my current employment as an e-Learning Support Officer at Southampton Solent University. This job involves a high level of computer skills, something this unit, and the whole MA helped me to prove.

However, although this unit has had tangible benefits, it does not relate specifically to my personal MA or career aims and objectives. This is because I was not able to explore related theory elements, and the main skills I developed were my group skills, which is still very valuable, but not a part of my set aims and objectives.

Professional Development

Tutor: Carolyn Cummings-Osmond & Seamus Finnegan

Period: 1&2

Credits: 15

Assessments: 40% Seminar Presentation (Dissertation proposal)
60% Learning contract

The completion of this learning contract as part of Professional Development has also been beneficial as it has allowed me to focus on my future aims and objectives and get a better picture of what I hope to gain, not only from this unit but from the rest of the degree.

During this unit I was able to develop my presentation and oral delivery skills. Because a number of seminars as well as one of the assessments required delivering a presentation to the rest of the group I was able to develop my ability in this area. This will benefit me in the future, for example when delivering a pitch to a publisher about a book, and is very much related to my personal MA aims. It has also had a positive impact already as it also helped secure my current employment as eLearning Support Officer, a job role heavily based around presenting to lecturers, students and support staff. This role may provide me the opportunity to complete my career objective of obtaining a PGCert in Blended Learning, as some of my current colleagues have done whilst in the same position as me.

Many of the lectures for this unit also involved developing oral abilities in presenting arguments and opinions in a thoughtful academic manner, often without much time to think before retorting. This is also a good academic skill to develop. Overall this unit has contributed greatly to both my personal MA and career aims and objectives by allowing me to develop skills and explore ideas that will contribute to obtaining further academic achievements in the next eight years.

Research Seminar

Tutor: Carolyn Cummings-Osmond & Russell Richards

Period: 2

Credits: 15

Assessments: 60% Research seminar
40% Research dossier

This unit is highly beneficial to developing my research skills for the future. It is also helpful as it allows me to effectively record research for possible future projects. I hope to develop my knowledge of research organisation and gain more background knowledge of research practices by the completion of this unit.

All of which will help with my personal and career aims and objectives. By preparing myself for a future of research and academic practice I have gained a great deal. This unit has also enabled me to explore areas of interest for my dissertation, which is a big part of my aims and objectives.

Persuasion in the Media Age (joined with Writing for Stage and Screen)

Tutor: Carolyn Cummings-Osmond (and Seamus Finnegan)

Period: 2

Credits: 30

Assessments: 30% Seminar Presentation and Report (Pictures and protests)
70% Essay

The unit has allowed me to take part in a variety of intellectual discussions. This has been an extremely useful process as it has challenged my academic ability and thought processes; it has also raised areas of further research. These related directly to my personal MA and career aims and objectives and will contribute towards the attainment of further academic achievement.

All of the above has prompted me to begin a blog*, sharing articles and areas of interest that arise from this unit and my wider research. Because this unit has been merged with Writing for Stage and Screen it has allowed me to share discussion with a wider range of perspectives. This is good practice for developing my presence in the academic world, and developing an academic blog could be a great way to

share ideas with others who have similar areas of research.

* <http://lilyacademic.blogspot.com/>

Final Major Project

Supervisor: TBC

Period: 3

Credits: 60

For the Final Major Project I am writing a dissertation on the area of protests and the media, specifically looking at how advances in technology and media representation affect and influences protest. It was very difficult to narrow down the subject area, as there are so many different elements I could look at, which is why the dissertation will act as a 'dry run' for an academic book.

Although when I chose the subject of protests I did not realise how topical and contemporary an issue it would become, recent national and global events have provided a lot of research material to contemplate. I am very interested in this area because of its history as well, and so I will be including this in my dissertation also.

My research so far has proven to me that there is room for further academic works in this area. The range and quantity of information conveniently provides several different areas and chapters. For example women and protest, technology, peaceful protest, violent protest, the language of protest, protest songs, protest images and many other areas with a great potential for writing.

Conclusion

Overall I feel that the MA Media has been highly beneficial and relevant to my personal MA and career aims and objectives. The content of different units has allowed me to explore various ideas, concepts and theories, which also contribute towards my future achievement of academic publication and a PhD.

The assessments have also allowed me to explore and have developed my written, presentation and research skills. Again this relates to my aims and objectives and will contribute to obtaining further academic and personal achievements.

Although there have been some units or elements which have not contributed to my aims or objectives they have provides other unseen benefits, making them still very useful, if not in an anticipated way.

References

ANDERSON. G., D. BOUD AND J.SAMPSON., 1996. Learning Contracts: A Practical Guide. London, Kogan Page Limited

BOAK. G., 1998. A complete guide to learning contracts. Aldershot, Gower

PETERSON, D., 2011. *How To Write a Learning Contract* [online] [viewed 5th April 2011]. Available from: <http://adulted.about.com/od/intro/ht/learningcontrac.htm>

Appendix 1: Curriculum Vitae

Dominique Renault

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PERSONAL PROFILE

I am a very creative individual, and enjoy coming up with new ideas. Highly computer literate, with experience using blogs, wikis, Twitter and social networking sites, I have a special interest in technology and academia. I am passionate and always put my full commitment into any task given to me.

EMPLOYMENT

2010 – Present: *Web Content Writer Intern* (Southampton Solent University)

- Creating content for the web
- Editing content for the web
- Uploading content for the web

2009-2010: *Temporary Office Administrator* (Dominion Corporate Group)

- Clerical duties, including photocopying and data entry
- Administrative duties, including filing and research
- Secretarial duties, including distributing mail and answering phones

2008-2009: *Temporary Office Administrator* (RBS Coutts)

- Clerical duties, including data entry
- Administrative duties, including filing

EDUCATION

September 2010 – September 2011: MA Media (TBC)

- Southampton Solent University

September 2007-June 2010: BA (Hons) Journalism (2:1)

- Southampton Solent University
- Also achieved Tee line Shorthand 80wpm

September 2005–June 2007: 3 A Levels and 1 AS Level (Grades B-C)

- Hautlieu School

September 2000-June 2005: 8 GCSEs including English, Math and Science (Grades A-C)

- Jersey College for Girls
- Also achieved an AS Philosophy of Religion (Grade A)
- Also achieved a European Computer Driving License

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

A very fast learner who can adapt and apply skills to other software or hardware as required. These include, but are not limited to:

- Microsoft Office
- Adobe Creative Suite (inc. Dreamweaver and Photoshop)
- Website Content Management Systems

HOBBIES AND ACTIVITIES

Published in 8 separate poetry books by United Press

- Heartland (2009)
- A Writer's Quest (2009)
- Poetry Diary 2009 (2008)
- Inspirations (2008)
- Angel's Breath (2008)
- Perfect Magic –hardback (2006)
- Affectionately Yours (2005)
- Still Life (2004)