Connections Course Syllabus

Course Dates
- Pre-semester session: August 22-24
- Follow-up sessions: Weeks 2, 4, 6 of the Semester
- Coursework completed by: October 5
- Grades due: 72 hours after the final follow up session.

Required Texts (all provided to you at training)
- USU General Catalog (online at http://catalog.usu.edu)
- Aggie Blue Book (given at Aggie Orientation)
- Becoming a Learner by Dr. Matthew Sanders (given at Aggie Orientation)

Course Fee
$50.00 (paid as part of course registration) – The fee provides students with convocation speakers, class and evening activities, refreshments, supplies, and a t-shirt.

Connections Objectives
Throughout the Connections course, students need to think about why they are engaging in the college experience. The objective is that by the end of the course, students can comfortably answer all three of the Big Questions below and have a better understanding of the university and their place within it. Each activity, assignment, workshop, and discussion at Connections is designed to help answer one of the three Big Questions. It is the instructor’s responsibility to guide students to understand how each assignment helps answer the following questions:

Big Question 1: Why am I here?
A. What is an educated person? How does an educated person contribute to his or her community?
B. What role does general education play in educating a person?
C. What role does the major play in educating a person?

Big Question 2: How do I best engage myself in the process of becoming an educated person?
A. What does an intentional student look like?
B. What competencies do I need to develop in order to succeed?
C. What resources are available to help me succeed?

Big Question 3: How do I become a fully engaged member of the university community?
A. What opportunities are there for me to have fun and to become more invested in the university community? (clubs and organizations)
B. What is a learning community, and how do I go about building one?
C. What are the benefits of a common literature experience?
Connections Assignments

All classes have a common core syllabus and assignments. With over 85 different Connections sections, there are a variety of teaching styles and personalities among the faculty. The curriculum allows for a degree of instructor creativity to make each section unique. However, all Connections sections must include the following assignments, workshops, and discussions:

Common Literature Experience
**Online Discussion:** Students will engage in an online class discussion (in Canvas) focused around the common literature book (*The Boys in the Boat*) before arriving on campus. This will help them build a learning community around the common literature selection. (Big Questions 3B, 3C).

College Writing Discussion
**Discussion:** Students will participate in a classroom discussion related to the expectations of college-level writing (Big Questions 2B, 2C).

Resilience and Overcoming Challenges
**Activity:** The objective of this activity is to reflect on the attitudes, people, skills, and resources utilized in both the trials and triumphs of life, to recognize resilience in overcoming difficulties, and to acknowledge the role personal responsibility plays in resilience and success.
**Assignment:** Students will explain how to successfully achieve their educational goals. Specifically, they will identify potential challenges they expect to face, along with the resources that are available and an immediate action plan to overcome each challenge (Big Questions 2A, 2B, 2C, 3B).

Cultivating Habits of Mind
**Assignment:** This assignment prompts students to explore their current study habits and skills within the framework of cultivating habits of mind that will benefit them throughout and beyond their college experience (Big Questions 2A, 2B, 2C, 3B).

Designing Your Education
**Assignment:** Students will be taught how to use Degree Works (USU’s official degree audit system). Students learn about the parts of the degree, and how they interrelate. Students will then create a two-semester plan in Degree Works. (Big Questions 1B, 1C, 2A, 2C).

Designing Your Life
**Workshop:** This workshop, led by Career Services, focuses on career exploration as a part of life planning (Big Questions 1A, 2A, 2C, 3A).

Student Resources
**Activity:** Students will navigate the *Aggie Blue Book*, student affairs websites, and the online General Catalog to find answers to questions related to policies, procedures, and student resources. This gives students the framework needed to answer questions and solve issues (Big Questions 2A, 2B, 2C, 3B).

Campus Technology
**Workshop:** Students are introduced to the IT computer labs and campus technologies, including the student portal, Canvas, Banner, Aggiemail, USU Identity, and how to reserve group rooms in the library (Big Questions 2B, 2C).
Using the Library

**Activity:** Students will be briefly introduced to the USU Library basics such as the BARN, building policies, resources, and resource librarians. Students will then engage the library through a scavenger hunt (Big Questions 2B, 2C, 3B).

Connecting to Campus

**Assignment:** This requires students to attend the Day on the Quad (for fall sections only), an Aggie Passport event, and write a brief response identifying at least three clubs or organizations they are interested in joining (Big Questions 3A, 3B).

Building a Learning Community

**Discussion and Exercise:** The class will discuss their role in forming learning communities, and some of the obstacles they may encounter that will prevent them from fully engaging in a learning community (Big Questions 1A, 2A, 3B). Students will learn from a faculty member about how to succeed in their first year at USU (Big Questions 3B, BC).

Upstanding Bystander Intervention

**Discussion:** Students will learn the basic principles of bystander intervention, and learn how they can contribute to a safe learning environment for themselves and others by exhibiting pro-social behavior (Big Questions 1A, 2C, 3B).

Time Management

**Assignment:** Students will estimate their out-of-class study time, design an ideal schedule based on that estimate, and then practice following it for a couple of days. Students will also plot their semester assignments and due dates on a calendar (Big Questions 2A, 2B, 2C).

Communication and Conflict Management

**Workshop:** Students will be exposed to key skills and concepts in resolving conflicts in a variety of relationships: family, roommates, friends, and instructors (Big Questions 2A, 2C, 3B).

Becoming a Learning and the Purpose of a College Education

**Assignment:** Students will write a short paper (2-3 pages) exploring their own journey toward becoming a learner. They will also explain their understanding of the purpose of a college education. Finally, they will articulate and explain three reasons why they are enrolled in higher education classes and describe the three major components of a university degree (general education, depth education, major courses) and describe the importance and interconnection of all three (Big Questions 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A).

Honor Pledge

Upon admission to the University, students agree to abide by the Utah State University Honor System by signing the Honor Pledge, which reads: “I pledge, on my honor, to conduct myself with the foremost level of academic integrity.”

A student who lives by the Honor Pledge is a student who does more than not cheat, falsify, or plagiarize. He or she espouses academic integrity as an underlying and essential principle of the Utah State University community (Big Questions 1A, 2A).
Classroom Civility

Civil discourse is a core value of the university because the university is meant to be a place where students confront a wide range of ideas and opinions. Confronting a wide range of opinions is essential to the task of learning how to think, for no one learns how to think well if they do not seriously engage opposing ideas and counter-arguments. In addition, confronting a wide range of ideas increases both self-understanding and understanding of others.

Having ideas challenged can, at times, be an uncomfortable thing for students. Students should embrace this but see in it also the importance of civil discourse. Civil discourse is intellectual engagement shaped by mutual respect. This atmosphere of respect is required for there to be any intellectual engagement or growth at all. For this reason, students need to remember that the university is a battleground of ideas, not a battle between persons. So, when students express themselves or disagree with someone else, they should avoid offensive language or personal attacks. Always keep the focus on the content of the ideas rather than the person making them.

Students have a right to a learning environment that is free of harassment and unlawful discrimination. If any classroom or learning venue is failing to live up to this standard, students should immediately contact the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs by phone at (435) 797-1712 or by email at suzanne.thorpe@usu.edu. Students should learn their rights by visiting: https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode/index (Big Questions 1A, 2A, 3B).

Grading Scale

Connections is a graded course worth two credits. The grading scale that is used by all of the classes is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>465-500</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-92.9</td>
<td>450-464</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86-89.9</td>
<td>430-449</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-85.9</td>
<td>415-430</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-82.9</td>
<td>400-414</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-79.9</td>
<td>380-399</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>73-75.9</td>
<td>365-379</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-72.9</td>
<td>350-364</td>
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<td>66-69.9</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>0-63</td>
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Accommodations

Students with documented physical, sensory, emotional, or medical impairments may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations. Veterans may also be eligible for services. All accommodations are coordinated through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Room 101 of the University Inn, (435) 797-2444 voice, (435) 797-0740 TTY, (435) 797-2444 VP, or toll free at 1-800-259-2966. Please contact the DRC
as early in the course as possible. Alternate format materials (Braille, large print, or digital) are available with advance notice (Big Questions 2C, 3B).

Attendance
Class sessions will start promptly and students are expected to participate during the entire class period. Early departure, as well as anticipated absences, will only be excused in cases of extenuating circumstances. Please, as a courtesy to all, turn off all cell phones before coming to class except in cases where cell phones are used in activities and/or instruction. If you have a situation requiring an adjustment to this policy, please discuss this with your instructor (Big Questions 1A, 2A).

Participation
Students will frequently ask: “Do I need to attend the entire class?” The answer is simply, “yes.” Much of your learning will occur as a result of your attendance and participation, and your grade is dependent upon it as well. Class participation includes asking appropriate questions and sharing comments with the class, bringing materials for in-class work, and attending the lectures (Big Questions 1A, 2A, 3B).

Late Work Policy
Missed class activities and assignments may only be made up in extremely extenuating circumstances at the discretion of your instructor. Late assignments are only accepted under unusual circumstances and your grade is reduced for each day your assignment is late (Big Questions 1A, 2A).

Course Evaluation
At the end of this course, students will complete a course evaluation. The Connections evaluation is slightly different than the evaluations students complete in other courses at USU. In most courses, students will complete something called IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction (IDEA Evaluations). Students will be expected to complete an evaluation for each of their classes, and in each class the instructor will explain how their selected IDEA “learning objectives” link to the course activities and objectives being pursued.

The feedback received through these evaluations is a critical aspect of refining the curriculum. They also inform decisions made by students, faculty, and administrators:

- IDEA evaluation results are available to all students who participate in the process: [http://www.usu.edu/aaa/evaluations_all.cfm](http://www.usu.edu/aaa/evaluations_all.cfm).
- IDEA evaluations are used by faculty members to improve their courses. There are many examples where instructors have changed materials, changed course structure and delivery, or changed student instruction as a direct result of IDEA evaluation results.
- IDEA evaluations are used by departments and colleges to make strategic choices about course offerings and content.
- IDEA evaluations are used to inform decisions about faculty hiring, promotion and merit.