

Center for Intercultural and Civic Engagement

Experience: CICE Student Leaders

Reflection Assignment: Cultural Autobiographies

The autobiography is an analysis of how you came to be who you are. Before we can fully understand others as cultural beings, it is important to understand ourselves. As you reflect, consider what attitudes and beliefs about the world around us have influenced who you are. You should describe how your demographic location (your ethnicity, gender, economic situation, race, sexual orientation, cultural background, nationality, etc.) interacted with your social, cultural, and geographic location (those people and places around you) to help shape your identity. Ultimately, it is **your** story that you are telling. Our stories will help to illuminate the way we organize and understand our experiences. The autobiography is not meant to be a chronological report of the major events in your life, but should highlight the major themes of your life that have helped to determine who you are. You may wish to focus on exploring your sense of self and identity in the context of family, community, nation, and/or world.

Some important questions to consider before and during the composition of this paper:

- Was there a time when you were unconscious of your cultural self/identities?
- When, why, and how did you first become aware of them?
- When did you first become aware of being different from those around you?
- What supports did you have in the struggle to come to grips with your identity?
- Are certain aspects of your demographics more influential in your life than others?
- How has your family influenced your development? What are some of the values and beliefs shared by your family that you hold?
- Can you identify certain values and beliefs that you hold in common with a national or regional mainstream culture?
- Do you consider yourself a member of a dominant culture, minority culture, or both?
- Can you identify certain values and beliefs that you hold in common with or differ from mainstream social justice culture?

These are only a few of the aspects you should examine in order to write your story with accuracy and strength. Though you should not feel tied to these questions, and certainly you should not undertake answering them all in a direct or “list” fashion, but it would be hard to write a cultural autobiography without considering at least some of them. Feel free to render the narrative in whatever style best fits your life and your mind. Most importantly, remember that it is **your** story. What experiences have shaped your story and influenced how you understand your identity and your relationships with others from different backgrounds?