

Assignment: *Your Philanthropic Autobiography*

Storytelling is powerful. It can be used to educate and entertain others, and to transmit and inculcate ideas, values, and beliefs across time, space, and cultures. As a college student and emerging professional in your field of choice, storytelling is particularly important because it can help you understand, interpret, and communicate your own personal and intellectual development. Storytelling can help shape the manner in which you present yourself as a candidate for employment or applicant for graduate school.

Autobiography is a particular form of storytelling through which we convey the stories of our lives to others. Each of us could tell the story of our lives from a variety of viewpoints. You could write about your educational experiences, your family background, your employment history, or you could present your story using particular talents, interests, or passions, such as singing, sports, animals or your romantic relationships. This assignment combines the powerful practice of storytelling through autobiography to explore your own personal connections to philanthropy and the nonprofit sector.

The nonprofit and voluntary sector is made up of nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations, as well as individuals who give their time, contribute their money, earn their living, or use the services of these same organizations. Your Philanthropic Autobiography (see page 21 in Payton & Moody text) is the story of your life told from the perspective of your involvement with these nonprofit organizations and voluntary associations. What organizations and associations have you been involved with – as a contributor, as a volunteer, as a user/customer/patient/member, or as an employee? What organizations have meant the most to you and why? What values are reflected in your interactions with these nonprofit organizations? And how have you personally benefited as a recipient of the support that others have given directly to you or through these organizations and associations?

For the assignment, you will write a 3-page essay indicating how your life has intersected with these organizations and activities. It is important that you tell the story of your connections to philanthropy and the nonprofit sector rather than simply present a list of your activities. Your essay should contain a thesis statement and appropriate development of supporting elements of your story. When describing a particular person, organization, or experience, be sure to provide adequate background to orient the reader.

As you prepare for this assignment, remember the definitions of philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and voluntary action, and remember the great diversity of organizations and activities represented in the sector, such as private/parochial schools, hospitals, houses of worship, community centers, neighborhood watches, community sports leagues, book clubs, etc. You may also have experience with giving behaviors that do not quite fit formal definitions, and you may explore those as well.