

Explore Your Purpose: Enduring Understandings



In the process of developing DePaul's *Explore Your Purpose (EYP)* initiative, one of the early tasks involved talking about the theological notion of vocation and the basic idea of the *EYP* initiative with focus groups from across the university – faculty, staff and students representing a wide range of departments, perspectives, disciplines, backgrounds, and social identities. What became evident in these conversations is that the theological notion of vocation, upon which this project idea was based, and for which our grant funding was eventually received, needed to be translated and communicated in alternative ways for different audiences. We hoped that doing so would allow those who were not religiously or theologically inclined themselves to begin to connect with the concept from their own perspective in order to find it meaningful for them.

Based on this experience, the *Explore Your Purpose* team developed a conceptual framework and language to accompany the project in a way that would provide a more widely-accessible entry point for a diverse audience, while also maintaining the integrity of the theological notion of vocation. Working with the DePaul Office for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, this framework was constructed by using four “enduring understandings,” a concept used in a curriculum development process called backward design. (See: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/cft/guides-sub-pages/understanding-by-design/>). We believe the enduring understandings below communicate the essence of the concept of vocation, while also offering the greater flexibility needed for a wide variety of settings and greater accessibility for a diversity of audiences.

The following represent the four pillars of the conceptual framework being used to organize DePaul's *Explore Your Purpose* initiative:



Enduring Understanding #1:

LIVING A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Personal meaning and social purpose are essential components for a good and fulfilling life and are assets in one's work/career.

This initial dimension of vocation recognizes that each individual person is unique, possessing a particular constellation of skills, talents, interests and curiosities, as well being rooted in a particular social location, cultural background and sense of identity. Therefore, the exploration of vocation or purpose involves growing in self-knowledge and self-awareness. Learning activities designed to facilitate self-knowledge and self-assessment, therefore, are part of this enduring understanding. Additionally, this enduring understanding places this self-knowledge into a broader context that goes beyond just work and career. While the flourishing of each unique person certainly occurs in the realm of work and career, it also unfolds and is realized in the context of family, friendship and community. A rich sense of purpose or vocation is about who we seek to be as a whole person across the different contexts and situations of our life. Therefore, while job and career may be a vital part of where our sense of calling is lived out, so also are other areas of engagement and relationship outside of the day to day workplace. We bring our whole selves to our work life, and the place of work in our life impacts other dimensions of our life, such as our social and family lives. Therefore, a meaningful life and a robust sense of vocation will be influenced, present in, and shaped by all the various dimensions of our life.



Enduring Understanding #2:

DISCERNING VOCATION

Discerning a sense of vocation (personal meaning and social purpose) happens over time and requires intentionality and ongoing personal reflection as well as help from others.

This second dimension of vocation is grounded in the development of a habit of reflection on one's day to day life experiences, including how we understand our own life story and the events and relationships that have shaped who we are and who we are becoming. As we learn to live reflectively, we are paying attention to the clues and insights that may emerge in if we pay attention to the daily experiences of our lives and to how we may be called to respond. This habit involves an ongoing openness to new experiences, encounters and ways of imagining our lives, as well as the desire to learn and grow. This enduring understanding also recognizes that it is the people in our life who may be among the most important allies in helping us to see, understand and point out to us our own vocation.



Enduring Understanding #3:

UNDERSTANDING THE VINCENTIAN HEART

Living with personal meaning and social purpose is not all about you, for ultimately it must include how you relate to the larger world and human community.

This third dimension of vocation recognizes that we are social beings who are part of a larger context and society within which we bear some responsibility for or towards others. In a meaningful and purposeful life, my life is not "all about me." In considering our sense of purpose or vocation, we must consider not only our own advancement, but also what we are contributing to a larger common good. What is our "life's work" and what role are we playing in the broader society? What problems can we help solve or address in the world? The wisdom and challenge of DePaul's Vincentian mission suggests that if we are to find meaning and fulfillment in life we are wise to consider our relationship and responsibility towards those in society who are most vulnerable and marginalized. How can our particular gifts, resources, talents and influence be used for their betterment?



Enduring Understanding #4

SUSTAINING THE JOURNEY

Sustaining personal meaning and social purpose over a lifetime will require moving through moments of difficulty and developing sustaining practices which foster and evolve one's sense of vocation in an ongoing way over time.

This final dimension of vocation recognizes the need for an ongoing "growth mindset" in relation to our sense of purpose and how it can be integrated into the evolving circumstances of our life. It is inevitable that our lives will involve challenges and obstacles as we seek to grow into becoming our "true self" in line with our sense of purpose, and as we seek to sustain our values and commitments over time. We will need specific, ongoing strategies and practices that can help us to cultivate, sustain, and adapt our sense personal meaning and social purpose over time and in the different and changing contexts and situations of our life.