

## Signature Assignment

### A Story of Self: Thailand Edition – Leadership Through Reflection

#### Assignment Purpose

This reflection assignment uses Marshall Ganz’s *Story of Self* framework (originally developed to help community organizers cultivate values-based leadership) to help you understand and share your personal journey as you engage in our Thailand Honors Abroad Program. You will write two Stories of Self: one before the program and one during the final week, allowing you to notice how your experiences and values shift throughout the program.

This is not just a personal narrative; it’s a leadership practice. Your story is a tool to connect with others, mobilize shared values, and inspire collective action. It’s about *who you are, what you value, and why you are called to act*.

This assignment is designed to help us begin building a community<sup>1</sup>—one grounded in trust and mutual support. True community requires a willingness to open up, to listen deeply, and to share honestly. Through this assignment, we invite you to reflect critically and thoughtfully on the experiences, values, and identities that have shaped who you are. Your Story of Self is more than a personal narrative; it’s a *public* narrative that you share that helps others understand what moves you, what matters to you, and what has brought you to this moment. You’ll have the opportunity to share your story with the group on **June 3rd**.

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#### Assignment Structure

**Part 1:** Pre-Departure – Story of Self (Before)

**Due Date:** Before arrival in Thailand

**Length:** 800–1200 words

#### Prompt:

Tell the story of why you are here—what brought you to apply for and join this program? What do you hope to learn, to unlearn, to change? Use the *Story of Self* framework to reflect on your personal values, identity, and the experiences that shaped you. In particular, focus on:

- Key choice points in your life that have shaped your values and motivated you toward this experience
- Challenges you have faced and the values you drew on to navigate them

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<sup>1</sup>Community is so easy to say.... But the meaning of community is complex.... Community is not a place, a building, or an organization; nor is it an exchange of information over the Internet. Community is both a feeling and a set of relationships among people. People form and maintain communities to meet common needs. Members of a community have a sense of trust, belonging, safety, and caring for each other. They have an individual and collective sense that they can, as part of that community, influence their environments and each other. People are most often part of multiple communities (Chavis & Lee, 2015)

- Moments when you felt the world needed changing—and times when you believed it could be

### **Guiding Questions:**

These are to help you generate ideas. Don't feel like you need to answer them all; use them to brainstorm and find a meaningful story arc that resonates with you.

- What values are core to your identity, and where do those come from?
- Who influenced your path? Family, mentors, role models?
- What experiences from childhood or early life shaped your sense of justice, identity, or purpose?
- When did you feel a sense of calling to make a difference?

### **Visual Art:**

Integrate 2–3 visual artifacts (photos, found objects, poems, journal pages, etc.) that reflect the heart of your Story of Self—what value, place, or emotion it represents.

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### **Throughout the Program: Visual Journal**

Reflection is not something we do one time, and then we are finished, but rather it is an ongoing process that we engage with daily. Throughout your time in Thailand, capture photos that address some of the topics below. The goal is not aesthetic, but reflective.

- Moments of disorientation or learning.
  - Something ordinary that has taken on new meaning for you.
  - Moments of that challenge or affirm your values
  - Moments that surprise you or make you reflect differently
  - Moments of discomfort, confusion, or growth
  - Important or impactful relationships with your community
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### **Part 2: Final Week – Story of Self (After)**

**Due Date:** Final days of the program

**Length:** 800–1200 words

### **Prompt:**

Tell the story of who you are *now*. How has your understanding of self, purpose, or leadership changed? What new key decisions or moments that required a shift in thinking or direction did you encounter in Thailand, and how did you respond? What values did you lean on or reevaluate during this experience?

This is not about having everything figured out. It's about tracing a journey of transformation and naming your evolving perspectives, attitudes, and values. You may want to reflect on moments of tension, discomfort, or insight that challenged what you once believed and how those moments opened up new ways of thinking, relating, or acting.

This is your opportunity to frame your time abroad not just as a learning experience, but as a *transformative* step in your leadership journey.

### **Guiding Questions:**

- What experience/s challenged your previous assumptions or beliefs?
- Did you encounter a moment that caused you to see the world or yourself differently?
- How did you emotionally respond to those moments? What did those emotions teach you?
- Did you find comfort or clarity by connecting with others who shared your disorientation or change?
- What new roles or ways of being did you explore in response to these experiences?
- How might this transformation affect your commitments or future work?
- What knowledge, skills, or attitudes did you gain that you'll carry forward?

### **Visual Art:**

Integrate 2–3 visual artifacts (photos, found objects, poems, journal pages, etc.) that reflect the heart of your Story of Self—what value, place, or emotion it represents.

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### **Learning Goals**

- Practice critical, collective, and actionable reflection through a leadership lens
  - Translate personal values into a coherent narrative
  - Track personal transformation across intercultural experiences
  - Connect your values connect with a broader purpose or community
  - Leave the program with a deeper understanding of what calls you to act and have a plan of action
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### **References**

Chavis, D., & Lee, K. (2015). *What is community anyway?* Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR).

[https://ssir.org/articles/entry/what\\_is\\_community\\_anyway](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/what_is_community_anyway)

Leading Change Network, Ganz, M., New Organizing Institute, Gibbs, P., & Sinnott, S. (2014). *The power of story: the story of self, us and now*. The Commons: Social Change Library.

<https://commonslibrary.org/the-power-of-story-the-story-of-self-us-and-now/>