Creative Studies Graduate Student Master's Projects   International Center for Studies in Creativity

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A College Woman's Guide to Self-Discovery

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A College Woman's Guide to Self-Discovery
by

Lee Anne White

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2011

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

A College Woman's Guide to Self-Discovery

College students often ask big questions: Where do I fit in? What gives my life meaning? How can I make a difference? And where do I begin? Women at this age are on a journey of self-discovery, exploring these and other complex, life-changing issues that don't have easy answers. For this master's project, I created a prototype of a book for college women and recent graduates who are on a journey toward authentic living. It is about helping them identify their unique strengths, values, and abilities; discover and harness their passions; and develop a creative mindset that will help them navigate the unfamiliar, yet exciting places their lives may lead. While it does not offer answers to life's big questions, it does provide thought-provoking essays, journaling prompts, and creative exercises to help them explore these questions on their own. It does so from a uniquely female perspective, with stories and advice from women who have passed this way before them.

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Date

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Dates of Approval

_____   _____

                                                        Dr. Cynthia Burnette
                                                         Assistant Professor

_____   _____

                                                        Lee Anne White

DEDICATION

For the women of all ages who have inspired, encouraged, and challenged me along this journey toward self-discovery and authentic living, and especially for those younger women who encouraged me to pursue this project and for whom this book of self-discovery is being written.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One might expect writing from the heart to be a solitary endeavor. It is not, or at least it was not in the case of my master's project. To begin with, there were those for whom I was writing, and those who have influenced my thinking over the years.

In addition, there were those who contributed directly to my book prototype: Barbara Blossom Ashmun, Dr. Dana Boyd Barr, Mary Kay Culpepper, Maria Ebrahimji, Erica Glasener, Elizabeth Thomsen Greenberg, Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers, Diane Kruger, Melanie Rothschild, Joyce Tenneson, Jeni Webber, and Liz Wilkinson thrilled me with their openness and insights, and their voices helped bring the pages to life.

My professors at the International Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State College have challenged and supported me throughout this program and this process, opening my eyes to new ways of thinking. Special thanks to Dr. Cynthia Burnett, my advisor; the late Dr. Mary Murdock, who encouraged me to find an audience for my writing on women's creativity; and Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers, who shares my interest in women's creativity and talent development, and who has been so generous with her own time, experience, research, and insights.

I cannot imagine having completed this project without Connie Abar, Liz Aebersold, Whitney Cochran, Kelsey Floyd, Darby Kennedy, Peyton Owen, Joan Pafford, Farrah Rahimpour, Alison Sellers, Liz Wilkinson, and Heather Wilson, who gave generously of their time and provided both useful feedback and much encouragement.

And finally, I would like to thank my mother, Betty Romberg, and my husband, Alan White, both of whom were patient, supportive, and understanding as I worked toward my degree and completed this project.

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Purpose and Description of Project

College students tend to ask big questions: Where do I fit in? What gives my life meaning? How can I make a difference? What will I do when I graduate? In my work with college women, such questions come up on a routine basis. Women at this age are on a journey of self-discovery, exploring these and other complex, life-changing issues that don't have easy answers.

Consider, for instance, the dramatic changes in the expectations and roles of women in recent decades. These young women have opportunities available to them that their grandmothers never imagined and that many of their mothers could only dream of. Yet, despite having so many more opportunities to choose from, very little is mapped out for them—especially when it comes to balancing careers with caregiving. While women have made headway in almost every field, there are still too few role models and mentors available to today's young women. Women (and society as a whole) are still figuring things out.

While I can't answer life's big questions for these young women, I *have* discovered that guided journaling and certain creative problem-solving exercises can help them take a deeper look at these questions on their own—to initiate a meaningful internal dialog in which they can begin to visualize their dreams and identify some of the first steps toward their futures. I have also found tremendous value in both one-on-one and group conversations on topics such as values, creativity, talents, passion, life paths, balance, and leadership. In particular, I have observed how developing a creative mindset helps these women better embrace change and tackle the various challenges that life throws their way.

For my master's project, I have developed a prototype of a book for college women and recent graduates that addresses these topics and concerns—drawing from my own life experiences, the experiences of other women, and the research available on creativity and female talent development. It is a book about exploring strengths and interests, discovering passions, and developing creative-thinking skills that will help young women navigate the unfamiliar, yet exciting places their lives may lead. The book is conversational in style, featuring short essays interlaced with journaling prompts and creative exercises, as well as quotes and anecdotes from inspiring women. I like to think of it as a *mentor in a book*—a guide to encourage young women along their journey of personal discovery.

Completing this book is beyond the scope of a semester, thus the prototype. It features a cover, front-of-book material, essays, and sidebars—conceptualized, written, designed, illustrated, and presented in an e-book format.

Rationale for Selection

Since my first research assignment in the creative studies program, the subject of women's creativity has intrigued me, as studies have shown that women and men may not only define creativity differently, they may express it differently as well (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Ealy, 1999; Firestone, 2006; Goff, 2002; Piirto, 1998; and Reis, 1998). This, in turn, has led to an exploration of female talent development. My studies have evolved, hand in hand, with mentoring and advising students in a collegiate women's organization and at a women's college. I wanted my master's project to reflect and build upon these experiences.

In my studies, I was struck by research (Kerr, 1994; Kerr, Kurpius, & Harkins, 2005) which showed that talented college women are at the greatest risk of losing sight of their

dreams, lowering both their career aspirations and their estimation of their own self worth—more so than talented male students or other female students. I found this highly disconcerting.

While a wealth of resources (books, counseling, summer camps, and specialized educational programs) are available for talented girls (K-12), there is little available to these women once they reach college. Professors and student development personnel often play key roles, particularly on smaller university campuses or in honors programs. Internships frequently help as well. Yet so much more is needed, especially when it comes to exploring vocational aspirations and developing strategies for finding balance in life. By sharing my own experiences and insights, as well as those of other women, and by providing tools that young women can use on their own, I hope to help bridge that gap.

SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE

Identify Pertinent Literature or Resources

Writing a book for young women has given me an opportunity to synthesize and apply the work I have done throughout the creative studies program. It draws upon a foundation of creative problem solving and facilitation gained in courses, as well as my project work and independent study in women's creativity and female talent development. For this master's project, I have drawn ideas and inspiration from seven principal sources:

Literature on women's creativity. Among the most surprising discoveries for me when beginning this graduate program was that women had been excluded from most early studies on creativity because they were not considered creative (Helson, 2008). This was due to their lack of creative achievement in almost every field—including those traditionally considered a woman's domain, such as fashion design, interior design, hairstyling, and cooking (Goff, 2002). Even today, although more women attain college degrees than men and comprise nearly half of the American workforce, a significant gender gap remains (Reis, 1998). For example, only 12 percent of top executives, 15.7 percent of corporate officers, and 12.4 percent of of board seats in 500 of the largest U.S. companies are held by women. The U.S. ranks sixtieth in women's political leadership, tied with Andorra and falling just behind Sierra Leone. Women lag significantly in terms of high-level recognition in the arts, higher education, and most other fields, as well (Wilson, 2004).

Despite this lack of achievement, studies using the Torrance Test for Creative Thinking (TTCT) have shown that women and men perform similarly on tests of divergent thinking and have equal creative potential, at least as far as these tests can predict (Kogan, 2007; Matud, Rodriguez, & Grande, 2007; Baer & Kaufman, 2008). Researchers have pointed,

instead, to a series of internal and exterior barriers including educational, social, and intrapersonal challenges that prevent women from reaching their creative potential (Hollinger & Fleming, 1992; Kerr, 1994; Noble, Subotnik, & Arnold, 1999; Reis, 1998; Walker, Reis, & Leonard, 1992). The reasons often have more to do with lack of opportunities, expectations, choices, and women's tendency to divide their creative energies into multiple areas.

But things are changing. As more women have made advances in all fields, research has shown that these women have taken diverse paths to creative achievement—paths that vary significantly from one woman to another and also frequently differ from those of men in the same field. Many women, for instance, often reached their highest levels of intellectual development and peak productivity later in their careers, after the age of 50 (Reis, 1995). Along the way, some women focused principally on their careers; many took time off to raise families; others found ways to combine careers and caregiving.

What these women have in common are certain traits such as ambition, confidence, curiosity, independence, imagination, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, willingness to take risks, openness to change, drive, autonomy, resilience, and a sense of destiny (Helson, 1999; McMeekin, 2000; Rieger & Blaubergs, 1979). They also appear to share a strong desire to make a difference in the world (Keller-Mathers, 2004; Reis 1995). Recent studies have also proposed that women perceive, express, and evaluate creativity differently than men—that women are more interested in personal expression than product development, more focused on process than outcome, more open to emotional expression, more holistic than linear in their approach to problem solving, and that they value creativity in both the professional and personal realms (Ealy, 1999; Firestone, 2006; Reis, 1998).

I have been influenced by the work of Reis (1998) and Kerr (1994), who have not only helped me understand why women lag in creative achievement, but have also made practical recommendations for working with young women to help them overcome these barriers. I have been especially fortunate to be able to discuss my own questions, concepts, and ideas with Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers, who completed her dissertation work in this area.

If there is any one guiding philosophy that has influenced the writing of my book, it comes from Kerr (1994), who recommended redefining achievement as "the use of one's gifts and talents, as one understands them, to the fullest. Achievement means being all that one can be, according to one's deeply held values" (p. xi). To me, this is what self-discovery and living an authentic life are all about, and this is what I hope the young women who read my book will take away with them.

Literature on talent development. The literature on female talent development heavily overlaps that of women's creativity, as most of the research conducted on women's creativity comes from researchers in the field of gifted and talented education. It is the work of Renzulli and Reis (2009), which is based on Renzulli's three-ring conception of giftedness (1986), that has perhaps been most influential in terms of helping me understand how to apply theories of talent development. Renzulli's model emphasizes three components of talent development: abilities, task commitment, and creativity. These also closely align with Amabile's (1989) three-part model of creative productivity which includes domain skills, intrinsic motivation, and creative-thinking skills. These three areas, which I refer to as talent, passion, and a creative mindset, form the organizational basis for my book.

While Renzulli (an expert on gifted and talented education) and Amabile (noted for her understanding of the role of creativity in business) hail from different backgrounds, they both emphasized the importance of creative productivity. In particular, Renzulli (1986) made

a clear distinction between schoolhouse giftedness and creative-productive giftedness, explaining that individuals whose contributions have changed fields and stood the test of time are noted for their high levels of creativity.

Literature on creative problem solving and other creative-thinking tools. Puccio, Murdock, & Mance (2007), with their thinking skills model, have greatly enhanced my understanding and application of the creative problem-solving process. The fluidity of their model—the ability to move in and out of different phases of the process—is both practical and appealing. When it comes to teaching creative problem solving to college students and introducing some of the basic tools for tackling challenges—whether group or individual—I have found the clarity and simplicity of Miller, Vehar, and Firestien's (2001) creative problem-solving model extremely useful. I have drawn heavily from both of these resources when developing exercises and journal prompts for the book. The connection Noller (1987) made between mentoring and creative problem solving has also served as a strong guiding philosophy in my work.

Books about women and women's issues. A number of books by women, about women, or dealing with women's issues have both inspired me and provided me with a sense of "not being alone" during key transitional periods of my own life. I have revisited several of these titles (Albert, 1992; Bateson, 1990; Heilbrun, 1988; Lunden, 1998; Madden, 1997; Rountree, 1991) while working on my master's project for continued inspiration, to help me reflect upon some of those key times in my life, and to help keep me in touch with other women's experiences and philosophies of life.

It is my hope that the readers of my book might also find some sense of connection and hope, knowing that other women have experienced the same excitement, doubts, and fears that they currently face. I especially appreciated Lunden's (1998) observation, which is very

much in keeping with the spirit of my book: "We all write our own life story. Your story is determined not so much by what life brings to you, but by the attitude and passion and curiosity you bring to life" (p. 237).

Other women. Beyond reading about other women, communicating directly with women has also been incredibly valuable. Although my book was not specifically designed to profile the lives of other women, I found that their voices and experiences helped bring the pages to life, and hearing their insights and stories has given me tremendous energy. I have been especially encouraged that women have responded to my inquiries. I have sought to include a range of voices—women of different ages, backgrounds, geographic areas, and professions.

Peers. One of my concerns in writing this book had to do with values. On the one hand, you can't write this kind of book without it being based on your own values. On the other, it was very important to me to encourage young women to identify their *own* values, and to live their lives based on those values. The women I chose for the peer review helped me keep these ideals in balance. They also brought a range of applicable professional and career experience. Two are retired deans of student development at separate women's colleges; one of those also served as the director of collegiate programming for a national women's fraternal organization. Another, like me, has served as an advisor to a collegiate women's organization for many years and now oversees other advisors as a province collegiate chair. She has also completed a graduate degree in women's history. And a fourth peer has an extensive background in corporate training and coaching, and a degree in learning sciences. She has proved to be a valuable resource at several key points in this process.

Young women. In many ways, I have been on a dual course of study: one in the classroom and one in real life. My studies have, in so many ways, changed the way I work with students at the women's college where I serve as an advisor and mentor. Although my basic philosophies and guiding principles have not changed, I have been able to refine my facilitation and coaching skills, as well as to teach these women creative thinking skills that they can use on a daily basis. It is emmensely gratifying to watch them voluntarily tackle challenging issues head-on, lead effective idea-generation sessions, and use language in their everyday conversations that enables them to approach problems as opportunities.

I have seen, first hand, how developing a creative mindset and environment can change the way individuals think and groups function. I have also seen many of these thinking tools help college women make, or at least move toward, significant life and career decisions. The women I advise and mentor were the inspiration for this project, and they have proven to be a great resource as well. Six of them reviewed and provided valuable feedback on potential titles and the final prototype. Involving them in this process made this project more fun, engaging, and meaningful for me. When I write, I write for them.

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SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN

In many ways, this master's project—a book for young women about living authentically, pursuing their passions, and becoming their best selves—has been in the making for quite some time. It is a creative project within the framework of a larger creative endeavor—illustrating how the creative process is not strictly linear, but rather one in which different phases may be revisted multiple times, allowing one to dive more deeply into certain aspects of a complex problem or challenge.

Over the past two years, I have moved through the basic creative problem-solving stages: 1) identifying and exploring the challenge, 2) generating and evaluating ideas, and 3) refining solutions and developing plans for action. It was during my very first assignment in the creative studies program that I came across the challenge. We were to write a research paper on any aspect of creativity. I chose to write about the connections between women's creativity and leadership development in a single-gender environment. Doing so raised many questions for me: What are the connections between leadership and creativity? Why aren't there more women in leadership roles today? Why don't more women reach their creative potential? How can we help young women develop strategies for overcoming common barriers? What is the role of education in helping women develop the leadership skills they need to succeed in their chosen fields?

I have spent the past two years exploring these questions in the classroom, through independent study, and by working closely with young women. I delved deeply into the subjects of creative problem solving, women's creativity, creativity and leadership, and talent development. In the process, I clarified my own views on creativity and its role in our lives, and embraced a new definition of achievement—one that has more to do with being all that

one can be, based on one's own abilities and values, rather than achievement as defined by professional and social recognition. This past year, I began covering the walls of my office and pages of my journals with sticky notes and mind maps—generating and evaluating ideas for tackling these challenges, and formulating a variety of plans for action. At times, it has been a messy, confusing, and even frustrating process. But I never lost interest in that process, and with the development of this book, those ideas are coming together in a cohesive and tangible way. I now have both a theoretical framework from which to proceed and the prototype of a book that can serve as a foundation for my work with women of all ages.

Making the Commitment

Admittedly, I approached this book project with a mix of excitement and trepidation: Could I find my voice and write this kind of book? Did I truly have anything to say? Would the pieces come together in a coherent way and on time? Would anyone care?

I sensed that, somehow, this book *would* eventually come together. I credit that, at least in part, to intuition. It felt authentic and had meaning to me. Something resonated deep within me and was driving me toward this project. It helped that several students expressed a genuine interest in the project as well—sharing their own questions and challenges, and encouraging me to tackle this rather than another project I was considering. I decided that even if I never published the book, it would still be a worthwhile endeavor because it would allow me to synthesize my research and thinking, and to identify specific ways in which I can become a better mentor to young women.

Crucial to this process were my day-to-day interactions with college women and recent graduates. They served as a constant reminder for why I was writing this book. Their

feedback to a survey on potential titles and subtitles was especially helpful, as was their

evaluation of the prototype. They also expressed interest in reading about other women,

which resulted in my reaching out to more than a dozen women for insights and anecdotes.

This introduced a time-consuming element I had not anticipated, yet it quickly became a

favorite aspect of the project. I loved hearing other women's stories and plan to reach out to

additional women as I move forward with this project.

On a purely practical note, I knew from producing other books that I would have a

sense for when it was time to move forward with different aspects of the project. I knew

that even though there is a logical progression to book production, that there are many

aspects of books that can be tweaked as you go—especially if you have your hands in all

phases of the process.

Project Phases

There were six significant phases of this project—all overlapping to some degree, often

to a large degree. I found that I enjoyed moving between them. When I had written all that I

could for a spell, shifting to interviews or design helped re-energize me. Although there is a

general sense of order to my creative process, it is not always a neat or linear one. It's just

the way I work.

Conceptualization. The first step was the conceptualization process—going beyond

the initial idea to develop a working title and overarching theme, determining the content

and organization of the material, identifying the elements—such as text, illustrations,

sidebars, and quotes—and developing a working design. These key decisions dictated how

the book was developed and written.

Perhaps the most important decision I made had to do with the organization and content of the book. Three overriding criteria were important to me:

- I believed the book should be based upon proven talent-development theories and practices.

- I wanted the content written specifically with women in mind, addressing some of the unique challenges and opportunities they face.

- I desired a strong sense of creativity woven throughout—in the text, as well as in the tools, exercises, and other sidebars. I believe that creativity is an essential life skill that will help women embrace whatever challenges are presented in life and will help them, both individually and collectively, break new ground and make greater contributions in all fields.

I explored various concepts in my journal, and then used brainstorming, highlighting, and clustering to identify potential topics and to organize the book into key sections.

Because I am a visual person, I needed a mental image of what the book might look and feel like. Although I did spend time looking at some of my favorite books, as well as a few books on publication design, it quickly became clear that I had a strong sense of what I wanted in terms of size, shape, color, fonts, white space, and elements. I had the sense that this book had been evolving in my mind for some time, even though the idea for it came to me just prior to declaring our master's project. I settled on a book size of 7.25" x 9.25", which feels intimate without being small, and spent time working with a rough design concept in InDesign—going just far enough into the process that I could have a *feel* for the book, and then tweaking the design and layout over the course of the project.

I also needed a working title and subtitle. This did not come so easily. I used brainstorming and word dance exercises to generate many approaches to titling, and then

created an online survey to obtain feedback from students. This feedback process identified a clear direction for the title of the book.

Interviews with women. I had originally planned to include quotes from other women culled from books and other sources. I had *not* anticipated actively seeking them out from women I knew and respected. However, one of the aspects I have enjoyed about previous creative studies projects has been interviewing, reading about, and gathering stories from other women. It appeals to the journalist in me. So after the students expressed interest in this, I decided to contact a number of women who have reached significant levels of achievement in their respective fields with a series of questions (see Appendix A for interview questions). I tried to keep the number of women manageable due to the size of the project and time restraints (but have a long and growing list of women I'd love to contact) and gathered as much of the information as possible from them via email rather than through interviews. I sought women from a variety of fields and wide age range. I was thrilled at the overall response, but disappointed that several of the women in their thirties did not respond. This is an area in which I will need to do additional work for the final book project, as I believe the voices of younger women in mid-career are essential.

Writing. One of the keys for me was blocking out uninterrupted segments of time to focus on my thoughts and settle into a flow of writing. I typically did this in three- to five-hour segments. After experimenting with several scheduling approaches, I found that I wrote best in the morning, and settled quickly into work as I drank my first cup of coffee.

Escaping alone to the beach for a writer's retreat early in the process was also beneficial. The change of environment allowed me to set other activities aside to focus exclusively on this project. Also, walking on the beach after extended periods of writing gave me a chance to refresh and reflect. I spent some time looking over materials and discussing the project

with one of my peer reviewers while I was there, and she provided both some valuable insight and strong encouragement for moving forward with this book. After four days of writing, however, I was anxious to get back to my own office where it was more comfortable to work and where I had easier access to the internet and my reference materials.

Late in the process, I had difficulty alternating between two very different types of writing (this book and a gardening book). Also, I had reached a state of flow on this project that I did not wish to interrupt. And so for several days straight, from early morning through very late at night, I worked exclusively on this book until the prototype was completed and sent to my review team.

Much of the time was spent finding my voice—determining how much I was comfortable revealing about myself and those close to me, when to include others' stories, and how much should simply be insight, information, or food for thought rather than stories. At times, I believed it was important to weave in bits of research, and it was a challenge to do this in a conversational manner.

Design and Layout. Logically, conceptual design comes early in the project process, while layout and production comes after all of the writing has been completed and edited. Even though that was my original strategy, it was not the way I worked. While I did complete some conceptual work at the onset of the project, I began laying out and producing stories as they were written and continued to write essays and tweak the design all the way through the final day of production. This worked for me. Seeing the book evolve on the screen helped me understand what was needed and would inspire me to write the next essay. It was during this process that the concept for profiles with brief questions and answers (versus just using quotes and integrating other women's stories in the essays) evolved. It was very much an integrated process for me and I enjoyed the changes in pace.

In many ways, I believe this allowed me to better take advantage of my shifting energy levels. While I needed to write and design when my mind was fresh; importing text files and focusing on the details of production suited me when my energy levels were waning.

  Evaluation. I asked six young women (three women's college students, one co-educational university student, and two recent graduates), along with four peers to provide feedback. Some of this feedback came very early in the process. The primary feedback came after I sent the prototype and a PPCO (Pluses, Potentials, Concerns, and Overcoming Concerns)-based evaluation form (see Appendix B for the evaluation form) out for review. The week or so that the prototype was out for review was the most difficult part of the entire process. I felt good about my prototype when I pressed the send button on my computer, but as I waited on responses, my inner critic kicked in and I began second-guessing everything. In the end, I found the evaluations to be highly encouraging. They not only signaled that I was on a track with potential, but offered many ideas for marketing and for future products and services. They also resulted in some wonderful ways to strengthen the final book product.

  Although I questioned my sanity in sending out work that had not been professionally edited, this proved to be a beneficial process that reminded me of the value of collaboration and how, despite my preference for independence and self-employment, I truly miss being surrounded by other creative individuals who challenge and inspire me daily. I like having a sounding board for ideas. I got excited about my book because students and peers got excited about my book. From the start, I had wanted this to be a participatory project—one in which the content evolved based on audience needs and interests, and was refined by seeking the input of others. These women helped keep me stay in touch with that goal.

Writing the Master's Paper. Writing the master's paper was an ongoing effort. This both spread the work out over a reasonable time period and allowed for reflection at different stages of the process. Perhaps because of this, and because of the need to revise early sections as my work progressed, it took much longer than originally anticipated.

Final Project Timeline

I know through many years of client work that estimating and tracking time tends to curb my creativity. However, deadlines do spur me to action. For that reason, I established several key deadlines to help me stay on target and then simply kept rough estimates of my time without getting bogged down recording every detail of the project.

The time spans and rough hours spent on the various phases of this project included:

Description	Approximate Time Span	Actual Hours
Conceptualization	February 8 - 18	17 hours
Design & Layout	February 13 – March 27	27 hours
Interviews, Surveys & Correspondence	February 28 – March 24	10 hours
Writing & Editing	February 24 -- March 26	71 hours
Title/Subtitle Survey	March 4 – March 10	3 hours

Evaluation, Feedback & Correspondence	March 24 – April 8	6 hours
Journaling, Sounding Board Partner Communication, Meeting with Peer Reviewer	January 24 – April 30	12 hours
Master's Paper Written, Edited & Delivered	January 24 – May 9	38 hours
Final Presentation Development	April 10 – May 2	14 hours
Total Hours	February 8 – May 9	198 hours

SECTION 4: OUTCOMES

The outcome of my efforts is an 88-page prototype of a book that I would like to write for college women. It includes sample essays, journaling prompts, sidebars, and front-of-book elements such as a cover, preface, introduction, and table of contents that I anticipate appearing in the final book. It is produced in a readable and printable e-book format.

My project is unique in that I not only wrote the book, but designed it and provided the photographs, as well. It is not customary for writers to design their own books, yet this was important to me for four reasons. First, I am a visual person and needed to be able to "see" the book as I was writing it. Doing so helped me set the right tone for the text. Second, since this book was more than flowing text, it was important to see how the various elements worked together on a spread and throughout the book. Third, a visual product should result in a stronger proposal package if I pitch this to publishers. And finally, I have always loved books and book design and wanted to try my hand at it.

Products

The prototype included the following:

- Book title and cover design.
- Interior page design with running text, sidebars, and section openers.
- Front-of-book material such as title pages, publishing information, acknowledgements, preface, table of contents, and introduction.
- Essays and journaling prompts.
- Sidebars such as creative problem-solving tools, exercises, and brief interviews with other women.

Book cover and title. I worked on potential titles for nearly a month while simultaneously developing the concept and identifying the content. I kept a running list of words and phrases, as well as potential titles and subtitles in my journal. I designed several potential covers (see Appendix C for cover options) and developed an online survey which I sent to the students for feedback on possible titles and subtitles (see Appendix D for title survey). In fact, the actual pairing of title and subtitle was suggested by one of the students. I refined it slightly, designed a cover (see Figure 1), showed it to several students, and then moved forward based on their responses. While I played around with several cover options that included photographs of women, I was concerned that they came across as being biographical in nature, which was not the intent. Going with a more symbolic image seemed to better capture the *spirit* of the book.
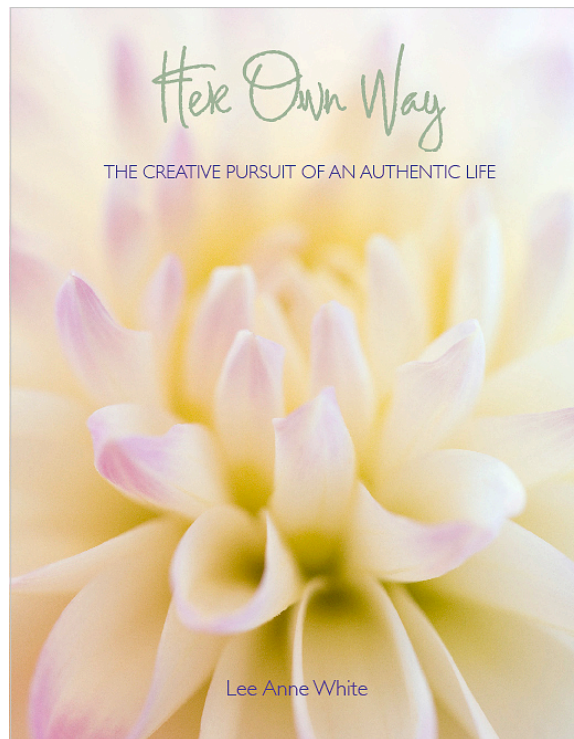

Figure 1. Working title and cover design.

Interior design. For the interior, I wanted a light and fresh design in keeping with the cover. Although this book could have been strictly text, I wanted it to be more visually inviting. I specifically did not want the book to feel busy, as it was meant to encourage deep reflection and to inspire dreaming. For this reason, I selected light fonts, left considerable white space on the pages, and utilized wide leading between the lines of type. I also chose justified type, which gives a cleaner appearance than ragged type (see Figure 2).
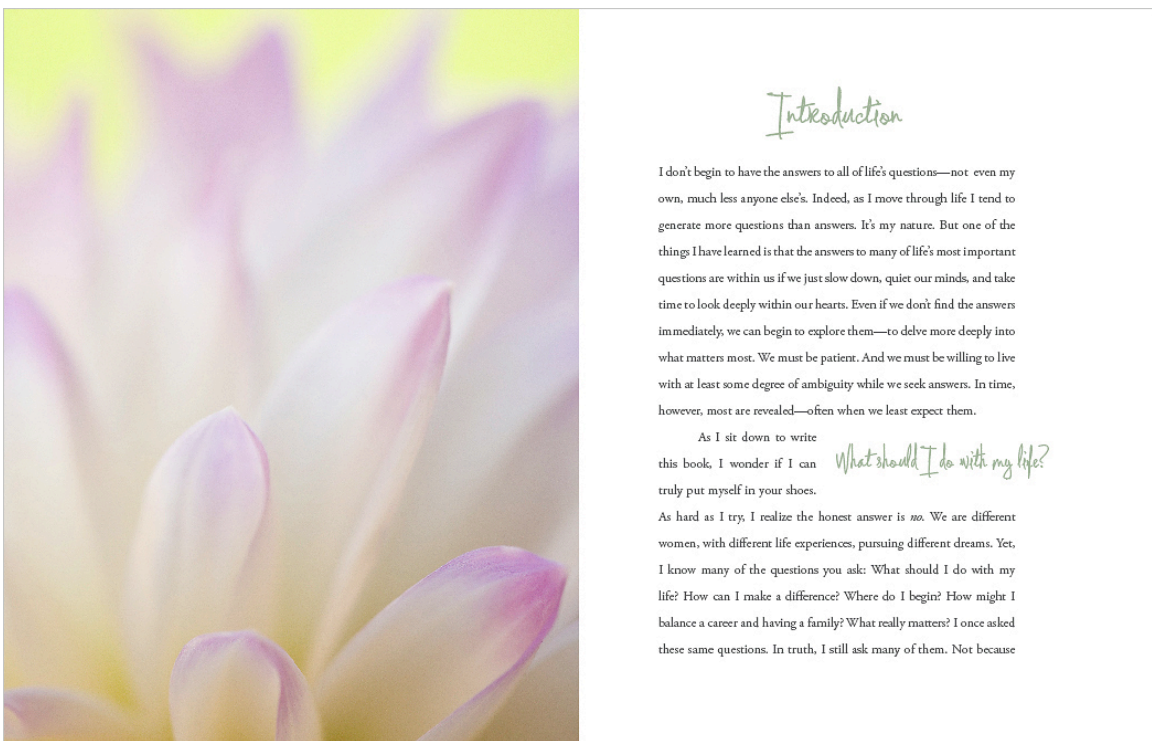

Figure 2. Interior page design.

I wove inspiring quotes into the section openers (Figure 3) and pull-quotes throughout the pages of running text. The four sections were clearly defined with floral photographs to tie in with the cover design and the chapters were broken up visually with full-page or double-page sidebars. The sidebars were set apart from the running text by the use of tinted

pages, wider margins, and a sans-serif font (Figure 4). I created a sense of unity among the sidebars by utilizing the same basic page design for each, yet set them apart with different colors and taglines.

Figure 3. Sample section opener with quote.

Front of book material. There are basic elements that belong in any book: a title page (Figure 5), table of contents (Figure 6), publishing data, and acknowledgements. I also chose to include a preface, which highlighted the theoretical and philosophical background for this project, and an introduction (see Appendix E for introduction text), which set the tone of the book.

Figure 4. Sample exercise with different margins, fonts, and layout.

Figure 5. Title spread.

Figure 6. Table of contents.

Essays. The essays are the heart of the book. They are a mix of personal stories from my own life, anecdotes from the lives of other women, and shared insights. I wanted the essays to be short; most run 800 to 1200 words (see Appendix F for a sample essay). Although they are organized into four main sections, each is a stand-alone element. This enables women to either read straight through the text or pick and choose the topics that interest them, which helps make the book more accessible and inviting. I included eight sample essays—two for each section of the book. The final book will have 20 to 24 essays. Each essay ends with a series of journaling prompts to encourage personal exploration and reflection (Figure 7).

Sidebars. The sidebars posed the greatest challenge. I had originally planned to introduce the creative problem-solving tools within the exercises. Yet, I found that I was

using many of the same tools for multiple exercises, and this felt repetitious. So I broke the tools (see Appendix G for a sample tool) and exercises (see Appendix H for a sample exercise) out separately. This was an improvement, yet I suspect this will continue to evolve as I develop additional exercises and introduce new tools. Journaling prompts appear at the end of essays rather than as separate sidebars.

The sidebars featuring short interviews with women (Figure 7) evolved midway through production. I loved the responses I received during the interviews, yet they did not always fit easily into the essays. Creating these sidebars provided another entry point, tied the women's stories to their biographies, and really helped bring the book to life in a new way. The sidebars include a brief biography, as well as several interview questions and responses (see Appendix I for a sample profile).

Figure 7. Spread with journaling prompts and profile.

Producing a prototype for this book has been much like producing any other product prototype. The process provides an opportunity to try different approaches, live with them for some time, and to obtain preliminary feedback from others without having all of the details worked out. It offers a chance to play and make mistakes without worry. Because it has not yet been edited, there is still time to polish the essays, play around with the exercises, tweak the profiles, and make any necessary adjustments to the layout. It also provides a tangible product for talking with publishers or printers, and a clear visual guide for taking this project to the next step.

SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNINGS

While the purpose of this project was to synthesize my learning and create something beneficial to young women, it also presented an opportunity to hone my writing skills by seeking a more authentic voice and to develop some basic book design and production skills. Through journaling, I was also able to explore my own creative process and compare this with my findings about women's creativity.

Creative Thinking is Essential to Talent Development

I drew heavily from my explorations in both talent development and women's creativity in determining the structure of this book. Both Amabile (1989) and Renzulli (1986) presented models that include domain skills, intrinsic motivation, and creativity as the key ingredients for creative productivity and talent development. I used these three elements as the backbone of my book, with sections titled "Tapping Your Talents," "Living With Passion," and "Developing a Creative Mindset." I also added a fourth section, "Embracing the Journey," which integrates information about the unique roles and life paths of women which Arnold, Noble, and Subotnik (1996), Keller-Mathers (2004), Kerr (1994), and Reis (1998) have explored in their research.

I have truly come to believe that creativity is an essential life skill and that by developing a creative mindset, we can more passionately pursue our dreams and more easily handle the challenges that life presents along the way. I have attempted to weave this philosophy throughout the book, and hope that the tools and exercises will give young women ways to begin strengthening their creative-thinking skills. Of these, I believe the most important is looking at challenges as opportunities.

My Authentic Voice is Conversational in Style

As a magazine editor, I learned that one of my greatest strengths was in "hearing" other people's voices. I could spend time with them, and then sit down and edit or ghostwrite an article that sounded like them. I believe this skill evolved during my years of writing speeches for CEOs; I had to learn their voices, too. What I had not necessarily mastered was writing in my own voice, although I've known for some time, whether intuitively or otherwise, that my writing voice is a conversational one in style. It's one that I've rarely been able to employ professionally, but get glimpses of when I write letters. So for this project, I started writing by imagining I was writing to one of my advisees. One student observed, "I feel as though you are sitting right beside me and having a conversation with me." Reading that feedback was very gratifying.

More often than not, I started my essays with a story. Sometimes it was a personal story. Other times, it was another woman's story. I'm not a storyteller in the sense of developing characters or conveying detailed descriptions. My stories are usually short life stories and experiences, meant to convey a point. But through this project and a recent workshop I took on digital storytelling, I am discovering the power of stories and how much I enjoy telling them. I believe this is a significant finding, and would like to build upon this as I develop future projects—whether the stories are used in books, magazine articles, multimedia presentations, talks, or workshops. In fact, I would like to devise a personal system for capturing stories as they happen or occur to me so that I can retrieve them more easily when I need them.

Among the challenges in writing personal stories is determining how much information to convey. Writing about one's self is not easy: Convey too much, and others may be turned off or just get bored. Convey too little, and they question your honesty. Tell stories of your

success, and it sounds like you're bragging (especially if you are a woman). Tell too many stories of your failures, and you risk losing credibility with your audience. There is also the issue of privacy: Just how much do you want people to know about your life? This is not a balancing act to master in a semester, but to explore over a writing career.

Book Design is Both Engaging and Time Consuming

Although I very much enjoyed writing the essays when I could find quiet time and settle into the right frame of mind, I equally enjoyed the design process. I could slip easily into a state of flow when I worked on the design. I also realized that I could get lost for hours tweaking minor things—which was not the best use of my time. I had only used InDesign software for a couple of other much smaller and simpler projects, so there was a significant learning curve. Teaching myself new software is always a challenge, and I suspect I would benefit greatly from a workshop on InDesign. I found ways to do things, yet I suspect there are much *easier* ways to do just about all of them.

I was also reminded during this process that a designer must strike a balance between aesthetics and practicality, and that issues such as cost must come into play. I was pleased with the general direction of the interior page design, particularly the running text. The ample white space and generous leading (space between lines) was an important element in conveying an appropriate tone for the book. Yet I also realize that it will run up the cost of the book by adding pages. Likewise, adding photographs to the opening spreads of each section will significantly boost paper and printing costs. As I negotiate with a publishing company or printer, some of these design elements may need to be altered. I also contemplated making this a journal, with space to write, but cut that from the prototype because of the extra cost to print those pages. Yet, "having space to write" appeared as a

suggestion on almost every evaluation. I may rework the design to include a bit of space for notes and investigate developing a companion journal for the book. Having a prototype in hand and options in mind should make it easier to explore options with a publisher or printer.

The Millennial Generation *is* Open to Conversation and Reflecting

The Millennial Generation is often described in terms of its different communication style, which includes texting, online chats, social media, blogging, and the Internet. Despite this emphasis on short, informal communication, often without face-to-face contact, my experience has shown that they are still capable of deep reflection and meaningful conversations. Still, I have found that they appreciate different entry points into the material. On the Internet, this means following links. In books, it is more about short text, sidebars, and visuals.

Much of what I see developed for this generation is very bold and busy, often with brash colors. I was relieved that these women responded very positively to white space; soft, earthy colors; and a lighter, more elegant design. They appreciated having different elements, but didn't necessarily want them all packed onto the same spread.

One of the questions that both my peer reviewers and I had was whether or not students would take time for reflection and journal writing. While I have found today's college women to be very open to reflection in group settings and amenable to journal writing when I have worked with them one on one, I realized that acting on a journal prompt in a book was very different from those more personal experiences. Yet, the students rated the journal prompts as among their favorite elements of the book. It is possible that this is due to the personality types of the women chosen to serve on the review

team. Yet, the audience for books tends to be self-selecting, and these are the kind of women for whom I was writing. They noted that having specific questions to explore in their journals was especially helpful—that they enjoy journaling, but often struggle with topics to write about.

I may add conversation starters at the end of each chapter for those women who prefer talking with friends rather than writing in a journal or that could be used during group discussions or retreats. I also plan to integrate some visual journaling exercises both for a change of pace and for those who tend to be more visual learners.

The Themes in This Book May Appeal to a Broader Audience of Women

As part of the feedback process, I asked the reviewers what they saw as the potential for this book. Recurring themes included campus or conference workshops for college women, developing a companion journal, creating an online community, and writing similar books for other groups of women.

I believe that writing about life transitions and developing a creative mindset can provide a way to reach not only more young women, but women of all ages. Several peer reviewers mentioned that they were planning to use the exercises and journaling prompts to facilitate their own mid-life or retirement transitions. Even several students commented on opportunities for adapting the content to audiences of older women. Upon reflection, I realize that going through my own mid-life transition has likely helped me connect with younger women. We ask many of the same questions and experience many of the same emotions. Our responses to those questions and the actions that we take as a result are simply different.

My Creative Process is Rarely Linear

One of the things I have contemplated throughout my studies of women's creativity and was able to spend more time with during this project is my own creative process. This is partly because I am curious about how the creative process varies from one individual to another, and partly because I would like to better understand and improve my own process. I have asked other women questions about their creative process, what inspires them, how they have embraced change, how their life paths have unfolded, and what advice they would offer to younger women. And so I decided it was only fair to ask myself those same questions. Many of the answers are woven into the essays throughout the book. Others I have explored in my journal. A few may be worth mentioning here.

A fluid process. While there may be a logical beginning and end to my creative process, and while I may (or may not) go through each of the creative problem-solving stages, I do not necessarily, or at least not clearly, progress through them in a linear fashion. When working on a complex problem, I often work in several stages at once or move fluidly between them. Because complex problems or projects frequently have many elements, I may also be at the problem clarification stage for one element while exploring acceptance of another. Puccio, Murdock, and Mance (2007) described it this way:

> Although the basic stages of the problem-solving process have been shown to be empirically distinguishable, researchers have found that people will naturally move forward, backward, and across these elements (Mintzberg et al., 1976). So although the three stages of CPS represent the natural progression individuals go through when faced with an open-ended problem, this flow will not always occur in a sequential manner. (p. 36)

Also, I realize that I tend to start with a general sense of the end product in mind. In other words, I may not know the details of the end product, yet I know what it should *feel* like. With this book, I knew what it would feel like to hold it in my hands and turn the pages before I knew what it was truly about. I knew the tone of the book before I knew its topics. I suspect my creative strength lies in the *elaboration* of ideas rather than in the uniqueness of ideas. This causes me to wonder what opportunities and ideas I miss. Yet, perhaps it is consistent with visionary thinking, which occurs early in the creative problem-solving process and which Puccio et al. (2007) described as, "Articulating a vivid image of what you desire to create" (p. 50).

Exploring beyond skills. Puccio et al. (2007) presented very useful sets of thinking skills (such as diagnostic, visionary, strategic, ideational, evaluative, contextual, and tactical thinking) and affective skills (such as curiosity, dreaming, sensing gaps, playfulness, avoiding premature closure, sensitivity to environment, and tolerance for risk). What I have discovered is that I also tend to think of the creative process in terms of emotional states or mindsets, and not strictly skills. For instance, when assessing the situation, I tend to be calm, highly focused, productive, and not easily distracted. During ideation, however, I have an extremely high energy level and surprisingly little need for sleep. I am not certain whether this has more to do with the ideational phase itself or a personal preference for that phase of the process. I suspect it may be a bit of both.

I also tend to reach a high level of frustration when formulating solutions—so much so that I simply have to set the problem aside, take a break, and let the problem go. As a result, I often end up back at the ideation stage after a period of incubation before I am actually able to move forward with enthusiasm and confidence. I realize, too, that this is the stage at which I often abandon projects. Yet, I have learned that it is not just a matter of coming up

with ideas, but selecting and refining solutions that, for me, is perhaps the most critical phase of the creative problem-solving process. In other words, it's not just the idea, it's how that idea is implemented that matters most. This may be because I am a high clarifier and ideator, but average developer and low implementer. I suspect I am still ideating as I am fine-tuning and want it to come together just right. Unless I'm truly satisfied with the results, I'm not likely to move on to the implementation stage.

Inspirations. While I have always been inspired by nature and great design, I have come to realize that what inspires me *most* is other people's creativity. I get genuinely excited when others come up with breakthrough ideas—whether it is a group of students solving organizational challenges, artists experimenting with new media, or an editorial team pulling together a unique concept for a new book. In one of the essays I am still working on for the book, I talk about "embracing your inner wild woman"—whatever it is that makes you want to walk outside, throw your arms open to the world, and scream at the top of your lungs. There have been times when, after watching the work of others come together in a collaborative way, I have done just that. Earlier this semester, while facilitating a leadership retreat for college women, eight of us did that together as a group.

Journaling. In looking back over these key learnings, I realize that journaling plays multiple roles in my creative process: To record ideas and inspirations as they come to me, to explore those ideas through a fluid writing practice, and to gain insight on my creative process and learnings through reflection. By integrating or adapting specific creative problem-solving tools such as brainstorming, word dance, and PPCO, my journal also becomes a place where my decision-making process is documented. In time, I would like to develop a system for coding or highlighting key passages for future reference and explore the possibilities of visual journaling as part of my process.

SECTION SIX: CONCLUSION

Working on the prototype for a college woman's guide to self-discovery has been a challenging, yet deeply rewarding experience. I have greatly enjoyed the change of pace from my usual writing assignments and having an opportunity to write more from the heart and personal experience. While my goal was to help empower young women to trust their intuition, develop their skills, and pursue their passions, this project has actually helped me to do some of those same things. There have been many lessons along the way:

Creativity is More Than Just Solving Problems

Although I have been forming my own definition of creativity over the past two years, working on this project solidified my belief that creativity is *the act of solving problems, expressing one's authentic self, and transforming one's life in unique and meaningful ways.* I also believe that each of these three distinct, yet intertwining strands of creativity are linked by the concept of growth. I believe that by solving problems in creative ways we move closer to being able to express ourselves in unique and authentic ways which, in turn, helps lead to personal growth and transformation.

Creativity is a Frame of Mind

If I am in the right frame of mind—curious, optimistic, and open to ideas, people, and the physical world around me—just about anything can inspire me. If I am not in the right frame of mind—perhaps with too narrow a focus, in a bad mood, or tired—very little will inspire me. I have discovered that not only is it possible to *change* our mindsets, but that doing so is surprisingly easy (at least for those who are generally optimistic by nature). While

there are many ways to do this, the simplest and perhaps most profound is turning a problem into a challenge by asking, "How might I…?" It has made a significant difference in my life, and I have seen it change the mindsets of college women and become a part of their every day vocabulary.

Quieting the Inner Critic

Although I am very much a clarifier and ideator, I have discovered that I also have a very strong and quite imaginative inner critic. Evaluation, of course, is an essential part of the creative process. Yet, without an appropriate approach to the evaluation process, a strong inner critic can easily toss out the good ideas with the bad. That almost happened with this project.

Fortunately, I have found tools for helping me break through the stages in which I often let promising projects die. In particular, utilizing PPCO enabled me to better articulate the reasons for tackling this project, to realize that those reasons far outweighed my concerns, and to deal effectively with the concerns that were holding me back. This is the second time in the past year that using PPCO has allowed me to move forward with a meaningful project that I would have otherwise walked away from. It did not make either of them any easier, but it did help me realize that they were possible. It helped me tap my inner drive and passion.

Collaboration is Valuable, Even on Independent Projects

I have always enjoyed bouncing around ideas with others. Being self-employed doesn't always lend itself to collaboration, but when it does, it always brings a new level of energy and creativity to a project. In this case, the student and peer reviewers, as well the women

I interviewed, filled that role. Their encouragement, insight, and ideas helped give this project direction and energy. Many of their recommendations will help make the final book a stronger one and have given me ideas for future, related directions (see Appendix J for suggestions).

We All Have Something to Say

While one of my goals was to find my writing voice, I believe I discovered something even more important: That I did, in fact, have something to say. I recall having a conversation with Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers early in the semester, and wondering aloud if I really had anything new to say and whether or not anyone might care. She said that was a common sentiment expressed both by women she had worked with and the women she had interviewed during her own studies. Although it didn't answer my question, there was something comforting and reassuring about being in the company of other women.

I have often commented that I "think through my fingers" and "write to find out what I know," and that was particularly true of this project. It's why I keep a journal and strongly encourage other women to keep journals, whether written or visual. I do this in workshops and when working with individuals, and it was a key element of this book. I have discovered that through writing, we discover what we know. We gain insight through reflection, and find our own stories and truths. The women who responded to my interview questions also commented that they enjoyed this process—slowing down long enough to reflect, to tell their stories, and to share their insights. By sharing personal stories, we are able to make sense of our lives. And by hearing other women's stories, we have an opportunity to learn, to put our own lives in perspective, and to realize that we're not alone in this journey toward authenticity.

Next Steps

I am anxious to return to work on this project—to continue writing essays, fine-tuning and developing new exercises, and tweaking the design. Among my next steps will be to explore publishing options—either seeking a commercial publisher or self-publishing. And finally, I look forward to exploring the potentials for where this project might lead—such as new book projects, teaching opportunities, or workshops. Rather than coming to a close, I sense and hope that the journey may be just beginning.

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SECTION SEVEN: APPENDICES

Appendix A. Interview Questions for Women of Achievement

1. What are you passionate about? At what point in your life did you discover that passion? And how have you woven it into your personal and/or professional life?

2. How would you describe your career path—how you got from there to here?

3. Have female mentors or role models been important in your life? If so, in what ways? (Although I am primarily interested in female mentors, I also welcome thoughts about male mentors.)

4. How do you define creativity? In what different ways do you express creativity in your personal and/or professional life? (I would love to hear about something you have done that you felt was creative.)

5. Have there been any particular opportunities or challenges that you have encountered along the way that you believe were gender based or unique to women?

6. What are some of the strategies you have used to balance your personal and professional life?

7. How do you carve out time for yourself? And why is this important to you?

8. What advice do you have for young women who are just getting started on this journey of self-discovery? What do you wish someone had shared with you when you were twenty-something?

Appendix B. PPCO-based Evaluation Form

PROJECT EVALUATION

Name _____

Among the things I've learned about reviews, critiques and evaluations is that there are *always* multiple ways to approach any challenge or task and that we each have different thoughts and ideas on how to do that. Your different perspectives will help me to look at this project in new ways which will, in turn, help make my book stronger. You were chosen to serve on my review team because I trusted you to provide honest, productive feedback and because you bring a unique life or career experience, mindset/attitude, sense of style, and/or insight that I especially value and appreciate.

I'd like to use one of the evaluation/creative problem-solving tools that I will present in my book as the basis for this project review. It includes four essential steps. Please take as much space as you need to respond. Although you do not have to comment on every aspect of the book, I hope you will keep the following elements in mind as you go through this review process:

- Overall concept
- Content, and its suitability for the audience
- Title/subtitle
- Cover design
- Interior book design: layout, fonts, colors, quotes
- Writing style, tone, voice, use of personal stories and others' stories
- Back cover copy (does it accurately reflect the book, is it compelling?)
- Elements: essays, profiles, tools, exercises

Suggestion: Go with your first impressions. Don't over-think this. And if this review process doesn't work for you, simply send me your feedback or give me a call. I welcome your thoughts in whatever form you present them.

POSITIVES   What did you like? What worked? What were your favorite elements, essays or aspects of the book? Please be direct, honest and specific.

POTENTIALS   What opportunities might this book or some of its content lead to? What might be potential spin-offs for future growth or exploration?

CONCERNS Please express your concerns as open-ended questions that offer a possible direction for future development. Start each question with the words "How might you…?" [For example, one of my concerns is that there are too few younger women featured in the

profiles. I would phrase that concern as: How might you find more young women to feature in the profiles? By the way, please feel free to use that one if it was one of your concerns, as well.]

OVERCOMING CONCERNS Review your list of concerns. Take at least one of your concerns (preferably the most important one) and brainstorm at least 6 ways to overcome it. If you have the time and energy, please feel free to tackle other concerns.

Although it is not part of the PPCO review process, I would appreciate specific feedback on the following. Please rate those elements you read/reviewed only. (I understand that you likely did not have time to review everything. I tried to include enough essays so that you could choose several that appealed to you in some way.) Please rate these on a scale of 1-5:

1=Not useful, interesting or engaging
3=Somewhat useful, interesting or engaging
5=Extremely useful, interesting or engaging

___ Preface
___ Introduction

___ What do you value?
___ On becoming your best self
___ Major decisions
___ Don't cast it in stone
___ A woman's take on creativity
___ Embracing uncertainty
___ A woman's path
___ Alone time

___ On keeping a journal
___ Exploring your core values
___ Brainstorming
___ Assessing your skills
___ Star selections
___ Quick start
___ Profiles/Q&A with women

And one final, open-ended question: Are there big questions or life issues that I did not cover on the table of contents that are on you mind (if you are a student or recent graduate) or that you really grappled with when you were in your twenties (if you are a colleague)?

Once again, thank you so much for your time and insight. Please know how very much I appreciate this and appreciate you!

Appendix C. Cover Design Options
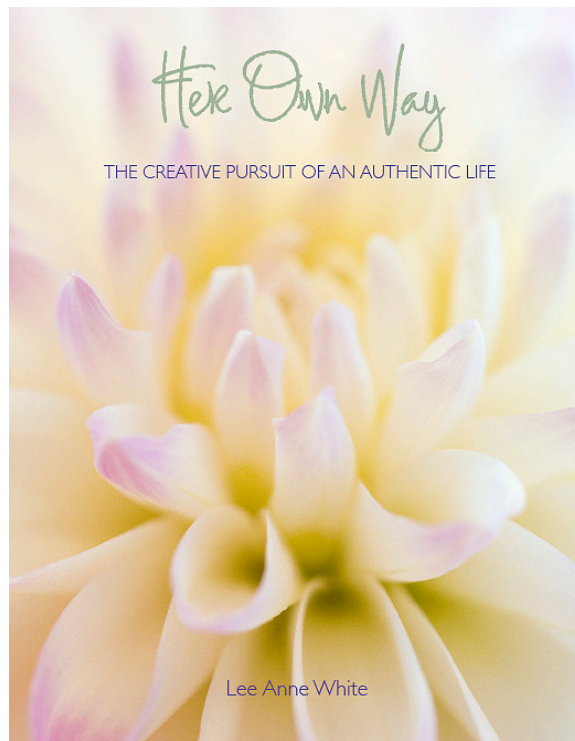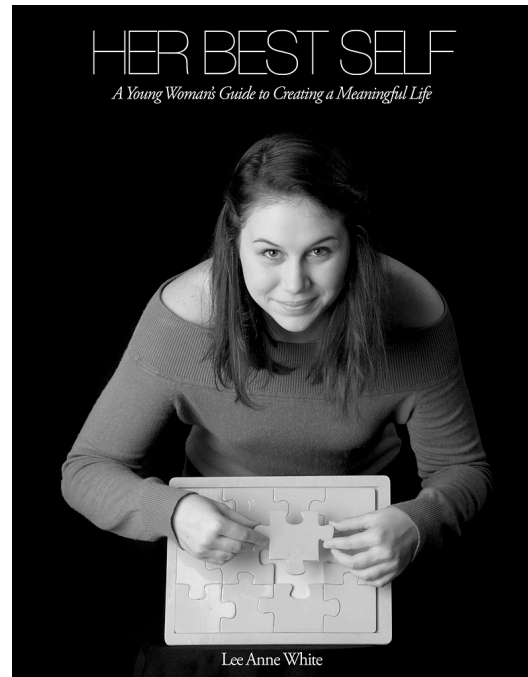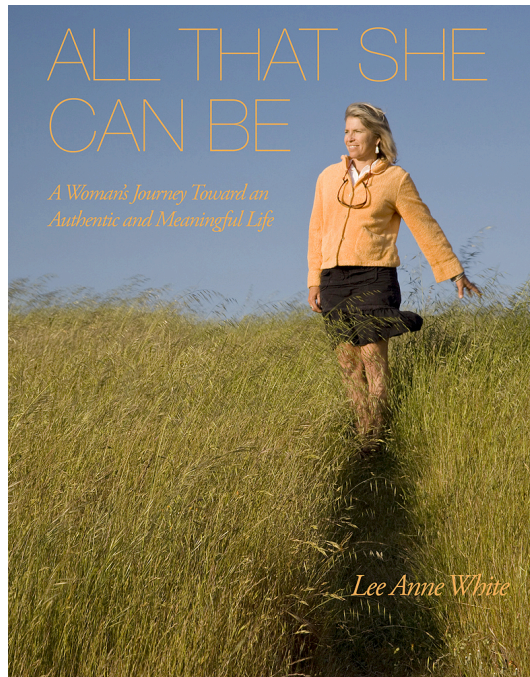
Appendix D. Title Survey

Book Description

Where do I fit in? What gives my life meaning? How can I make a difference? Where do I start? Graduating from college is an exciting time, but it is also one filled with questions.

This book is for college women and recent graduates who are on a journey toward authentic living. It is about discovering your passions, tapping your potential, and becoming all that you can be. It's about identifying your values and talents, and developing a creative mindset that will allow you to navigate the unfamiliar, yet exciting places your life may lead. While it doesn't offer answers to life's big questions, it does provide thought-provoking essays, journaling prompts, and creative exercises to help you explore some of these questions on your own. And it does so from a woman's perspective--with stories and advice from women who have passed this way before you.

1. Which (if any) of the following potential book titles appeal to you and help convey the content of the book based on the description above? (Check all that apply.) Do not analyze this; first impressions are the most important!

   ___ All She Can Be
   ___ Authentic Journeys
   ___ Inventing Herself
   ___ On Becoming Your Best Self
   ___ The Authentic Journey
   ___ Creating an Inspired Life
   ___ Inventing Yourself
   ___ Uncharted Territory
   ___ Reflecting on the Future
   ___ Creative Women. Embracing Change. Changing the World.
   ___ Making It On Her Own.
   ___ Making the Most of What Matters
   ___ Creating a Life You'll Love
   ___ Authentic Life Choices
   ___ Doing It Her Own Way

2. Which titles (up to three) appeal to you the most?

3. What other potential titles come to mind? If not full titles, how about words, phrases or brief descriptions that might give me something to work with? (Think of this as an online brainstorming session!)

4. Most book titles also have subtitles or short descriptors. Which of the following potential subtitles do you find appropriate or appealing? (Check as many or as few as you like.)

___ Becoming All That You Can Be
___ Creating Your Own Life Path
___ Women Finding Their Way in the 21st Century
___ A Woman's Guide to Creating Her Own Life Path
___ Authentic Paths, Creative Journeys
___ Finding and Following Your Passion
___ A Woman's Journey to Authentic Living
___ The Creative Pursuit of an Authentic Life
___ A Woman's Guide to Creating a Life You'll Love
___ A Woman's Guide to Creating a Meaningful Life
___ Inventing Yourself and Your Future
___ Finding Your Passion and Creating a Life You'll Love
___ A Woman's Journal of Personal Discovery
___ A Woman's Guide to Inventing Herself

5. Other suggestions, comments or combinations?

Thank you, ladies! I genuinely appreciate your input and welcome any suggestions and ideas. Have a nice day!

Appendix E. Introduction Text

Introduction

I don't begin to have the answers to all of life's questions—not even my own, much less anyone else's. Indeed, as I move through life I tend to generate more questions than answers. It's my nature. But one of the things I have learned is that the answers to many of life's most important questions are within us if we just slow down, quiet our minds, and take time to look deeply within our hearts. Even if we don't find the answers immediately, we can begin to explore them—to delve more deeply into what matters most. We must be patient. And we must be willing to live with at least some degree of ambiguity while we seek answers. In time, however, most are revealed—often when we least expect them.

As I sit down to write this book, I wonder if I can truly put myself in your shoes. *What should I do with my life?*

As hard as I try, I realize the honest answer is *no.* We are different women, with different life experiences, pursuing different dreams. Yet, I know many of the questions you ask: What should I do with my life? How can I make a difference? Where do I begin? How might I balance a career and having a family? What really matters? I once asked these same questions. In truth, I still ask many of them. Not because

I've been unable to find my own answers, but because those answers change over time. *We* change over time. We encounter new experiences and grow more fully into the women we were meant to be. Asking such important questions about who we are and how we can live a meaningful life is part of a lifelong journey.

While I may not have the answers for you, I do provide some tools to help you begin to answer these questions yourself—to initiate an internal dialog about what matters most in your life. These are exercises and tools I've found helpful in my own life. Many are tested and proven creative problem-solving techniques that work when tackling a wide range of challenges. I hope you will give them a try.

We change over time. We encounter new experiences and grow more fully into the women we were meant to be.

You'll also find essays laced with stories—both my own and those of other women who have asked similar questions, and faced a wide range of opportunities and challenges. Over the years, I've found both comfort and confidence when reading about and having conversations with other women. It is nice to know that we're not on this road alone. Whether role models, mentors, family members, or friends—other women have been there for me. They have inspired me and given me strength for the journey. I've highlighted some of these

women in profiles, and share excerpts from my interviews with them. These are women of all ages who I greatly admire for the difference they are making in their worlds. Try to think of them as *mentors in a book*, and seek out personal mentors throughout your own life, too.

I believe that we gain experience and skill by doing. and wisdom and understanding by reflecting. Reflection is a powerful tool—one that brings insight and understanding. It's one of the reasons I am a firm believer in journaling. Like many other journal keepers, I write to find out what I know. Almost always, I am surprised by the thoughts, knowledge, and ideas I have within me.

"Where did that come from?" I often wonder. Journaling is simply a way to draw out the answers (or sometimes more pertinent questions). Some people prefer creating visual journals with sketches, photographs, or collages to explore their ideas, feelings, and dreams. Others opt for "life talks" with friends. Those methods are helpful, too. A journal, however, is a place you can express your innermost thoughts without fear of judgment, and it provides a written record of your explorations for future reference. The point is to explore the questions, and you can do that in any manner that works for you.

You've probably heard the phrase "follow your bliss." I'd rather encourage you to *create a life you love*—one that taps your talents and passions, while allowing you to make a difference in some meaningful

way. No one lives your life or knows what is in your heart but you. In the end, you will not be remembered for what someone else did with your life, but for what *you* did with your life. You may not know what lies ahead, but if you can begin to visualize and articulate your dreams now, you are much more likely to live them. Imagining those dreams and moving toward them is a creative process, and I believe that life is something you embrace and create—not just something that happens to you along the way. What kind of life will *you* create?

...if you can begin to visualize and articulate your dreams now, you are much more likely to live them.

Few things in life are black and white. There are many paths you can take, each offering unique possibilities and adventures along the way. Your task is to figure out which path is right for you at any given moment in time. Learn to trust your intuition and to see opportunities at every turn. Embrace change and move toward new challenges.

My reasons for writing this book are many. First, I wish someone had shared more of these things with me when I was younger. I've heard other women say the same thing. Also, I have been inspired and touched by the college women I have advised and mentored in recent years. They have shared their dreams, plans, uncertainties, and questions with me, and they have been open to new ways of exploring

life's possibilities.

But most of all, I'm writing this book because I want you to believe in yourself, your talents, and your ability to achieve your dreams. You were placed on this planet for a purpose—one that is unique to you. You *have* talent, although perhaps you need to identify it and certainly you need to develop it more fully. You *have* passion; I can see it in your eyes and hear it in your voice. You *are* creative. We were all born creative. You can develop a more creative mindset just like you develop other thinking skills, and this will help you handle whatever life tosses your way.

As you'll hear from the women in this book, you've got to work hard to reach your full potential. Talent or intelligence alone is not enough. What matters most is having the right attitude. Determination, drive, resilience, optimism, passion, curiosity, and confidence will carry you places talent can't. Along the way, you will undoubtedly encounter uncertainty and, at times, will need to show resilience when things don't quite go according to plan. But never give up on what matters most in your life. Life is filled with opportunities. You have to prepare for them, put yourself out there, recognize them, and have the courage to take advantage of them. ❦

It is your confidence, optimism, and determination that will carry you far.

Appendix F. Sample Essay

On Becoming Your Best Self

Your best self. What does that mean, exactly? Let's start with the distinction between becoming *the* best and becoming *your* best. With nearly seven billion people in the world, it has become increasingly difficult to be *the* best at anything that is not highly specialized. If my goal was to become the best photographer, odds are, I would quickly feel very defeated. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2008, there were more than 150,000 professional photographers in the U. S. alone, with that number climbing each year. And that doesn't include the avid amateurs, many of whom are breaking new technological and creative barriers. But I don't need to be *the* best. I can still find my own niche, my own unique way of seeing and capturing the world around me, my own way of finding meaning and success in my work. I also do not wish to be defined or evaluated strictly by what I do. I would rather be defined by who I am, which is more complex and relates to how I live my life.

Being your best self doesn't mean being perfect, either.

Being your best self doesn't mean being perfect, either. I learned long ago that being perfect takes too much time and energy, can be

counterproductive, tends to annoy the heck out of others, and can even set us up for what one of my friends calls "expectation failure." Most importantly, I discovered that *doing the right thing* is almost always more important than *doing things right*— although there are certainly instances when it is important to do things right, as well. For what it's worth, I don't believe perfectionism is entirely bad. It often helps drive a person toward growth, self-actualization, and high levels of productivity in life. It simply becomes a problem when we start to feel bad about not being perfect, spend so much time perfecting things that we never finish them, or force our expectations on others. We have to learn to embrace the concept of *good enough*, so that we can accomplish more and continue to move forward in life.

So what I'm talking about is simply being *your* best self, based on your own values, interests, passions, and life circumstances. Each day, we are exposed to the values and expectations of others. When we use words such as *best*, *achievement*, or *success*, it's important to understand whose values define those concepts and whether or not they are consistent with our own values. Definitions of *success* and *achievement*, for instance, vary greatly by culture.

...doing the right thing is almost always more important than doing things right...

In the U.S., they have generally been defined by men. This doesn't mean that those values are wrong, yet some believe that women and men may interpret them differently. If that's the case, should women be judged by masculine standards of achievement? For that matter, should an individual be judged by anyone else's

standards of achievement? When is it appropriate, and when is it not?

Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers, an associate professor at the International Center for Studies in Creativity, has observed that "there are some ways of knowing and operating that are distinctly feminine." Among the key differences she has noticed between many men and women in the field of education is that more strong female leaders would rather contribute in the *...there are some ways of knowing and operating that are distinctly feminine.* classroom than run an institution. This doesn't mean women aren't capable of being fine institutional leaders; it's just that more women tend to believe they are at their best when working with students rather than when managing staff, budgets, and operations. Does that mean that women (or men) who choose to remain in the classroom are any less successful than the men (or women) who go on to become school principles or college presidents? A woman may be equally capable of both teaching and leading an institution; only *she* can decide where she is at her best and how she defines personal success.

Studies of older women who have achieved levels of eminence in various fields have shown that, despite their notable professional recognition, what some of these women actually considered their greatest achievement in life was raising a family. It was, perhaps, the balance they struck in the personal and professional realms that helped them become their best selves.

Are your interests more closely tied to the personal realm or professional

realm? Would you rather pursue a career in business or the arts? Do you prefer an adventurous life or one of security? Are you more interested in working with ideas or with people? It does not matter, as long as it is based on what *you* value. Of course, this is not always as easy as it might seem. It's natural that we want to please others who have supported and encouraged us along the way. It's easy to get

It's natural that we want to please others who have supported and encouraged us along the way

wrapped up in the expectations of parents, teachers, and others we respect. And, indeed, we may share many values and expectations with them.

The bottom line, however, is that it is *your* life—not your mother's, your favorite teacher's, or your best friend's life. Indeed, I suspect that all they really want is for you to be happy and healthy, and to become your best self—whoever she may turn out to be. ❧

In Your Journal

1. Can you think of a time you felt you were at your best—when things came together, when you were genuinely happy and living in the moment? What were you doing? What is it that made you feel that way?

2. In what ways might you move toward more situations in which you can be at your best?

Appendix G. Sample Tool

Tools You Can Use

Quick Sort

The quick sort is an excellent tool for making selections or setting priorities among 10 or fewer items. It's also one of the quickest and easiest decision-making tools around.

SUPPLIES
All you need is a marker and index cards. Scraps of paper work equally as well.

DIRECTIONS
- Write each option or idea on a card. Count the number of cards.
- Identify your least favorite option. Write the number of cards you have on that card.
- Identify your favorite option and write the number "1" on it.
- Continue this process, alternating least favorite and favorite from among the remaining cards, numbering them appropriately.
- Once all of the cards have been numbered, place them in order for a prioritized list.

WHEN TO USE THIS
- If you feel overwhelmed by everything you have going on and don't know where to begin, write down all of your projects, activites, or major responsibilities on individual cards and sort them based on importance, deadlines, or some combination of the two. If necessary, eliminate certain things altogether.
- If you are trying to decide between different topics for a thesis, project, or research paper, write your options on a card and sort them. You might want to take your top three choices and compare them further using an evaluation matrix (p. xx).
- When you've developed a working plan of some kind, you can prioritize the action steps to take for each strategy.
- When you're attempting to establish a timeline for a major project, write the steps or activities on cards and sort them into logical order.

Star Selections and Quick Sort are adapted from *Creativity Unbound: An Introduction to Creative Process* by Blair Miller, Jonathan Vehar, and Roger Firestien.

Appendix H. Sample Exercise

Exercise

Assessing Your Skills

In every field of endeavor, there are essential skills that must be mastered in order to perform well. It is helpful to identify the skills you'll need, to assess your current level of mastery, and to identify ways in which you can improve or develop those skills.

For instance, some of the skills I needed as a garden photographer included:

- *Photographic skills* to operate and make the best use of my equipment.
- *Artistic skills* for seeing light and composing compelling images.
- *Computer and software skills* for processing and marketing images.
- *Communication skills* for working with clients and negotiating contracts.
- *Organizational skills* to identify shot lists, book trips, and arrange shoots.
- *Knowledge of plants, horticulture and landscape design.*

Why don't you try this? Think about the field in which you hope to work or even a specific position you would eventually like to hold.

- In your journal or on your computer, make a list of the essential skills you need for that field. It might be helpful to devote a separate page to each skill so that you can easily keep a running list.
- Beneath each heading, assess your current level of skill. Would you consider your skill level weak, moderate or strong?
- Start a list of things you can do by answering the question: How might I develop or improve this skill? Write down all of the ideas that come to you.
- Once you have a solid working list, go back and highlight up to three ideas that you believe can be most effective in helping you move forward at this time.
- Select one to start with and set a date (marking it on your personal calendar or writing it on you to-do list) to take action.
- Revisit your list periodically—perhaps every few weeks or months. Keep track of your progress and identify next steps that you'd like to take.

Appendix I. Sample Profile

Women Changing Their World

Joyce Tenneson

Joyce Tenneson has been described by art critics as "one of America's most interesting portrayers of the human character." As one of the most respected photographers of our time, her work has been shown in more than 150 exhibitions worldwide and has appeared on the covers of magazines such as Time, Life, Entertainment Weekly, Newsweek, Premiere, Esquire, and The New York Times Magazine. She is the author of thirteen books, including her latest, Joyce Tenneson: A Life in Photography. She is the recipient of the Infinity Award from the International Center of Photography and the Distinguished Photographer Award from Women in Photography International. A poll by American Photo magazine named her among the ten most influential women photographers in the history of photography.

Are there characteristics or traits that you believe have helped you accomplish all that you have so far in your career?

Discipline, tenacity, and honesty are ingredients that everyone needs to have to be successful. That, along with talent. But talent is just part of the equation. I also believe that to be really good at something, you have to be disciplined and focused for a long period of time.

Did you have any female mentors or role models?

No, I never had female role models. I think that if I'd had a mentor when I was in my twenties it would have been a lot easier. Now that women have become successful in the field of photography, there are many female role models, but they weren't there when I was growing up or getting started in this field. I am passionate about empowering other people, so I enjoy serving as a mentor to many younger women.

What advice do you have for younger women today?

Do an internship with someone you really admire. That's where you'll learn the most. Work for somebody who is doing the kind of work that you think you'd like to do—even if it's for almost no money. You get the lay of the land, a real-world feeling for doing that kind of work. Also, be disciplined, believe in yourself, and know that you can do what you want by working hard.

Appendix J. Selected Suggestions for Strengthening Book and Future Directions

Quotes From Evaluations

"I definitely see you making a companion journal. Strictly full of quotes, questions, and blank space for women to become their own authors."

"I think that if this book was composed into some sort of website that was continuously updated with new and different information, maybe some success stories, it would be beneficial to many college students including myself."

"How might you expand on the level of success of the women in the profiles: 1) Women who have only just started their career; 2) women who perhaps failed/endured a circumstance where they had to re-evaluate their goals and how they over came it; 3) retired women and how they embrace a creative life outside of the workforce; 4) mothers/wives discussing their careers to emphasize how women receive just as much satisfaction from what they do in the personal realm as they do in the professional realm; 5) women living/working internationally and the creative experiences they've gained and traded; 6) a partnership profile that is a double interview of people whose creative lives are greatly weaved together…."

"I think that this book could definitely lead to workshop/seminar opportunities on a national basis, particularly on university campuses. I also think that women's organizations

such as sororities would have a high interest in having a workshop on the content of this book."

"Potential spin-offs could include a book/workbook that focuses on women starting new careers or perhaps a book that isn't gender specific. Another possibility is creating a journal that goes along with the book."

"How might you incorporate the word "authentic" more in the book in order for the subtitle to fit?"

"How might you include pages devoted to notes/journaling throughout the book to provide a place where readers can jot down ideas and have them right beside the content that inspired them?"

"How might you include some graphic interest on the pages devoted to inspirational women? Some more photography; photographs of the inspirational women; a standard graphic representing *Women Changing the World* that could be placed on each one; a watermark image of some sort in the background; an outline of some sort around the edges; corner details (example: a scrolling design in top left and bottom right)."

"Can you include a left brain perspective on creativity that maps to the bottom line? Many women run corporations these days. It would be great for them to connect with the content and see themselves as creative."

"Motivational speaking may be an avenue of interest."

"How might you find more young women to feature in the profiles?"

"Frankly, I think you have something here that transcends age—have you ever thought about that? Women in their 20s who have not found a direction yet, women in their 30s who are unhappy in their jobs, women in their 40s and 50s who are entering their generative phase and may well change fields completely, women who have just retired and wonder, 'Now what?'"

"Companion journals; speaking engagements to groups of young women; similar work addressing middle-age women; workbooks with similar activities."

Title of Project:

A College Woman's Guide to Self-Discovery

Name: Lee Anne White **Submitted:** February 9, 2011

Project Type: Use a Skill/Talent to Improve the Quality of Life for Others

<u>Section One</u>

Purpose and Description of Project

College students tend to ask big questions: Where do I fit in? What gives my life meaning? How can I make a difference? What will I do when I graduate? In my work with college women, such questions come up on a routine basis. Women at this age are on a journey of self-discovery, exploring these and other complex, life-changing issues that don't have easy answers.

Consider, for instance, the dramatic changes in the expectations and roles of women in recent decades. These young women have opportunities available to them that their grandmothers never imagined and that many of their mothers could only dream of. Yet, despite having so many more opportunities to choose from, very little is mapped out for them—especially when it comes to balancing careers with caregiving. While women have made headway in almost every field, there are still too few role models and mentors available to today's young women. Women (and society as a whole) are still figuring things out.

While I can't answer life's big questions for these young women, I *have* discovered that guided journaling and certain creative problem-solving exercises can help them take a deeper look at these questions on their own—to initiate a meaningful internal dialog in which they can begin to visualize their dreams and identify some of the first steps toward their futures. I have also found tremendous value in both one-on-one and group conversations on topics such as values, creativity, talents, passion, life paths, balance, and leadership. In particular, I have observed how developing a creative mindset helps these women better embrace change and tackle the various challenges life that throws their way.

For my master's project, my goal is to write a book for college women that addresses these topics and concerns—drawing from my own life experiences, the experiences of other women, and the research available on female talent development. The book will be conversational in style, featuring short essays interlaced with journaling prompts and

creative exercises, as well as quotes from inspiring women. I like to think of it as a *mentor in a book*—a guide to encourage young women along their journey of personal discovery.

Even though I envision this as a small book, completing it is likely beyond the scope of this semester, so I will develop a mockup, or prototype, featuring at least several chapters—conceptualized, written, designed, illustrated, and presented in an e-book format.

Rationale for Selection

Since my first research assignment in the creative studies program, the subject of women's creativity has intrigued me. This, in turn, has led to an exploration of female talent development. My studies have evolved, hand in hand, with mentoring and advising students in a collegiate women's organization and at a women's college. I would like for my master's project to reflect and build upon these experiences.

In my studies, I was struck by research (Kerr, 1994; Kerr, Kurpius, & Harkins, 2005) which showed that talented college women are at the greatest risk of losing sight of their dreams, lowering their career aspirations, and lowering their estimation of their own self worth—more so than talented male students or other female students.

While there is a wealth of resources (books, counseling, summer camps, and special educational programs) available for talented girls (K-12), there is little available to these women once they reach college. Professors and student development personnel often play key roles, particularly on smaller university campuses or in honors programs. Internships frequently help as well. Yet so much more is needed, especially when it comes to exploring vocational aspirations and finding balance in life. By sharing my own experiences and insights, as well as those of other women, and by providing tools that young women can use on their own, I hope to help bridge that gap.

And finally, although I have written and edited numerous books, they have always been practical books written according to a publisher's style. I see this as an opportunity to find my own voice and to write from the heart, which has long been a personal goal. Doing the initial design work (even if I later choose to involve a book designer or publisher) is also a creative process that I very much enjoy.

Section Two

Identify Pertinent Literature or Resources

There are six categories of resources that I will utilize as I work on this project:

- Literature on women's creativity, with work by such women as Sally Reis, Barbara Kerr, Ravenna Helson, and Susan Keller-Mathers.

- Literature on talent development, especially the work of Sally Reis and Joe Renzulli.
- Literature on creative problem solving and other creative-thinking tools.
- Other books about women and women's issues that have inspired and provided me with a sense of "not being alone" during key transitional periods of my own life.
- One or more peers I can bounce ideas around with and seek feedback from, such as my sounding board partner, Liz Aebersold, who works in a university setting.
- And, most importantly, the young women I advise and mentor. They are the inspiration for this project, a great source for ideas, and a terrific sounding board for ensuring that I'm speaking in a language to which this generation can relate. Involving them in some way will also make this project more fun, engaging, and meaningful for me.

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Section Three

How Do You Plan to Achieve Your Goals and Outcomes?

I believe the key to producing a successful non-fiction book with multiple elements is to get the concept right from the beginning. Sometimes, this comes together very quickly for me. Other times, it is the most challenging part of the process and can be quite time consuming. I never know which it will be until I am fully engaged in the process. Because this book is quite different from any I've produced before, I want to allow ample time to focus on the "big picture" and then draft at least several sample chapters, which I

will present electronically (e-book style) in a finished layout. If the concept comes together quickly, I hope to complete more of the writing.

Even though I have a preference for clarification and ideation, I am a good implementer when working on a project to which I am deeply committed or enthusiastic. I am genuinely eager to begin writing this book. I have also produced more than a dozen non-fiction books, so I believe I have a sense for when it's time to move forward with a project. Although I have found through previous work that estimating and tracking time tends to curb my creativity, deadlines do spur me to action. For that reason, I am establishing several key deadlines to help keep on target.

For book projects, one key for me is blocking out uninterrupted segments of time so that I can focus on my thoughts and settle into a flow of writing and design. Due to my current work assignments, I have already made some key changes in my schedule for the semester that I believe will help make this possible. In particular, I have blocked out most of my weekdays for writing, while restricting meetings and volunteer activities primarily to evenings and weekends. I have also designated certain days for work on a major client project, and other days for work on this project.

And finally, I believe getting feedback from students early in the process will be both a reassuring and motivating factor. I have described my project to several students who have expressed enthusiasm and interest, and had far more to say on the subject than I would have imagined. It is what originally propelled me forward, making a final commitment to this project. I hope to find ways to involve them at various stages of the process—perhaps discussing the content, generating ideas for potential titles, and providing feedback on some of the writing and exercises.

Prepare Project Timeline

There are five significant phases for this project:

Conceptualization – The first step in creating a non-fiction book is the conceptualization process—going beyond the initial idea to develop a working title and/or overarching theme, determining the content and organization of the material, identifying the elements (text, illustrations, sidebars, quotes, etc.) and how they will be used, and developing at least a preliminary design. These key decisions dictate how the book is developed and written, even if they change during the process. Because I am a visual person, I need to *see* how the elements (essays, quotes, exercises, illustrations) are going to work together. I will use a combination of creative problem solving and journaling exercises to tackle this process. I will also sketch some rough layouts and play around with various book sizes and font styles, as I want to make sure the tone is right.

Writing – I will create substantial blocks of time for writing (minimum three- to four-hour segments, longer when possible). This will also include time for preparation—gathering my thoughts, quotes, and reference notes.

Design and Layout – I will design and produce this book using Word, Photoshop and InDesign software.

Feedback – I plan to seek feedback from students and one or more peers at different stages of the process.

Writing Master's Paper – Writing the master's paper will be an ongoing endeavor, which will allow for reflection at each stage of the process.

Description	Target Completion Date	Estimated Hours
Conceptualization	February 25	30 hours
Writing	March 21	40 hours
Design and layout of mockup	April 4	25 hours
Final feedback	April 11	5 hours
Master's paper written, bound and delivered	May 9	20 hours

Section Four

What will be the Tangible Product(s) or Outcomes?

I will produce a mockup featuring a cover, introduction, and at least several chapters that showcase the various elements of the book. It will be presented as a PDF document.

Section Five

Personal Learning Goals

- To find my authentic voice by writing a book that comes from the heart.
- To find ways to communicate with and encourage a broader audience of young women.
- To synthesize my learning about women's creativity and female talent development in a tangible form.
- To explore ways I can take my experience mentoring students on a volunteer basis to a more professional level.

What Criteria Will You Use To Measure The Effectiveness Of Your Achievement?

I believe the following criteria will be important to the book's success:

- Addresses keys issues on the minds of today's college women.
- Speaks to them in a language they can relate to, that is conversational and readable.
- Provides journaling prompts and exercises that are engaging and provide useful insight.
- Conveys the importance of developing a creative mindset and specific ways for doing that.
- Is both practical and inspiring.

Evaluation

I believe the most important measure will be the response I receive from students. After all, this book is for them. I will know that my time spent on this project has been productive and meaningful if students show a genuine interest in this project, are eager to provide feedback and ideas, and find the material both inspiring and engaging. I will solicit such feedback both informally (through conversation) and formally (through a short survey or series of questions).

The feedback I receive from peers is also important, as they will challenge my thinking based on their own knowledge, training, and life experiences. Because the peers I hope to provide feedback all have coaching, facilitation, or student development experience, I know they will let me know whether or not I'm on track. I will provide both a set of questions and encourage any other feedback they have to offer.

And finally, I believe that I will know I have been effective when I have settled into a conversational writing style that both *sounds* and *feels* like me, and is something I feel truly comfortable sharing with others.