DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE ASSIGNMENTS: RESOURCES

The Degree Qualifications Profile was developed to encourage faculty members to develop assignments that contribute to learning and enable assessments that learning is taking place. There are many resources that can support the development of effective assignments, among them those listed below. Like the DQP, this is a “beta” document. You can make it more useful by suggesting additional sources you have found useful. Please direct any suggestions to Paul L. Gaston (pgaston@kent.edu).

An obvious starting point is the “occasional paper” by Peter Ewell, an author of the DQP and a long-standing national authority on assessment. See The Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP): Implications for Assessment. Urbana, IL: University for Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (January 2013).

University libraries routinely post guides to the development of effective research assignments. Because the DQP emphasizes active, applied learning, much of the advice these guides provide can be applied to assignments in general. The University of Maryland (http://www.lib.umd.edu/ues/guides/assignment) offers especially cogent advice on (1) clarifying the purposes of assignments, (2) preparing students to undertake assignments, and (3) acknowledging and incorporating the characteristics of effective research assignments: “clarity,” “unambiguous terminology,” “currency,” and a “reasonable time frame.” There is also a useful list of “pitfalls to avoid.”

Similar sites emphasizing research assignments are posted at
- Berkeley (http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/assignments.html)
- Pace (http://www.pace.edu/library/library-services/instructional-services/creating-effective-research-assignments)
- University of Washington (http://www.lib.washington.edu/help/guides/design.html)
- University of Texas (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/faculty/creatassignment.html)
- University of Illinois (http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/instructors/assignments.html)

Some sites go beyond research assignments to focus more broadly on writing assignments in general. Among the most helpful may be the following:
- MIT (http://writing.mit.edu/wcc/resources/teachers/createwritingassignments)
- Brandeis (http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/intensive/designing.html)

A Towson University site (http://www.towson.edu/provost/provost/oai/ISD/effectiveassignments.asp) offers some useful advice on creating effective online assignments. Nearly all this advice is applicable to assignments in any course.
Finally, some sites address assignments more broadly. One of the most provocative comes from the Division of Undergraduate Education & Student Affairs at Texas Tech (http://www.tlpd.ttu.edu/teach/TLTC%20Teaching%20Resources/CreatingEffectiveAssignments.asp).

Others include
- University of New Hampshire (http://www.unh.edu/teaching-excellence/resources/Assignments.htm) This site lists other useful links.
- Salem State University (http://www.salemstate.edu/4954.php) A useful “quick checklist” and FAQ.
- University of Alaska Southeast (http://www.ketch.alaska.edu/library/services/effective-assignments.html)

A 1996 book by John Bean (Engaging Ideas, Wiley, p. 78) offers six questions instructors should consider when creating an assignment. Because they align well with the intent of the DQP, they are worth paraphrasing:

1. Is my course thoughtfully and coherently structured? What are its principal units?
2. What are the principal learning outcomes intended for each unit?
3. What skills are embedded in these learning outcomes?
4. What are the most prominent challenges for students in achieving these outcomes?
5. In what ways might my course enable my students to become better students?
6. What difference should this course make for my students?

Other books that may prove helpful include the following:


Finally, there is an engaging PowerPoint presentation by Barbara Tewksbury of Hamilton College, “Achieving Course Goals by Creating Effective Assignments and Activities.” It can be viewed at [http://www.sencer.net/Symposia/pdfs/SSI2008/EffectiveAssignmentsPlenary.pdf](http://www.sencer.net/Symposia/pdfs/SSI2008/EffectiveAssignmentsPlenary.pdf)
Resources Related to Signature Assignments and the Degree Qualifications Profile

- AAC&U Pre-Workshop Reading on Signature Assignments at Salt Lake Community College
- DQP: Framework for connecting course-level outcomes to program-level outcomes (at associate’s, bachelor’s or master’s level): [http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/The_Degree_Qualifications_Profile.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/The_Degree_Qualifications_Profile.pdf)
- Ewell, P. (2013). The Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP): Implications for Assessment
- Salt Lake Community College – [Critical Thinking Using Signature Assignments](http://example.com) and [Implementing Critical Thinking with Signature Assignments](http://example.com) (by Dr. Thomas Zane)

Opening Session:

Signature Assignments: A Framework for Fostering Student Learning, Enhancing Student Engagement, and Improving Curricular Alignment (Dr. Kathy Johnson)

Draft Signature Assignment Criteria: Engineering (Facilitated by Karen Alfrey and Mike Hall)

- Some communication (written or oral) should be required to explain/present results
- Require critical thinking (with the type, scope, or expectation of depth varying by level of course)
- Some open-ended aspect – not just a single “right” answer
- Application of technology tools
- Tied to real-world data or problem
- “Project”: Scope is larger than a regular weekly problem set/homework; could also take the form of a set of assignments that build on one another, with a cumulative reflection piece
- Reflection: Students don’t just solve the problem, but discuss what they learned from it

Draft Signature Assignment Criteria: Writing (Facilitated by Carol Schuck and Mel Wininger)

Group 1

- Provides processes that scaffold
- Challenges students to think through the assignment
• Requires them to participate in an ongoing conversation
• Asks them to demonstrate appreciation/consideration of multiple viewpoints
• Requires self-reflection on learning processes & outcomes
• Asks students to take risks in new genres

Group 2

• Specific writing strategies practiced/targeted in assignment
• Consideration of one’s purpose, audience, and context
• Practicing research and writing about research
• Use of and engagement with ideas, sources, concepts of the course’s subject matter
• Attention to effective language use/voice
• Exploration of writing/thinking processes through staged writing processes and reflection upon one’s writing

Attending:

Karen Alfrey IUPUI
Sara Appel Commission for Higher Education
Peter Baney Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Gail Bennett-Edelman IUPUI
Art Bryant Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Ruth Cain Indiana State University
Norm Campbell Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Meredith Cummings Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Maggie Daniel Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Tracy Donhardt IUPUI
Julie Freeman IUPUI
Patrick Gee IUPUI
Mike Gress Vincennes University
Mike Hall Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Stephen Hancock IUPUI & Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Kumara Jayasuriya Purdue North Central
Kathy Johnson IUPUI
Nancy Lamm IUPUI
Heather McFall Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Frank Moman Ivy Tech Central Indiana
Dane Partridge University of Southern Indiana
Jeff Paschke-Johannes Ivy Tech Central Indiana
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