Introduction to Signature Assignment: Design and Implementation

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Agenda

1) Overview of Signature Assignments
2) Key Concepts
3) Activity: Designing and Implementing Signature Assignments
4) Q&A

Guiding Outcome for the Day
Identify the key concepts of signature assignments
Guiding Outcome for the Day

Identify the key concepts of signature assignments
What are signature assignments?

What they are not...

- The “most weighted” or “highest point” assignments
- Single assignments (i.e. in-class work, low stakes assignments, etc.)
- Disconnected from learning outcomes
- Easily removed from the course

What they are...

- The *emphasis* of the course (or most representative of students’ learning)
- Authentic and meaningful learning experiences
- Connected to learning outcomes
What makes an assignment “meaningful” to students?

- **Individual Connections**
  - Academic development
  - Future career
  - Previous experiences
  - Desire for self-expression
- **Social Connections**
  - Peers
  - Family
  - Community members
- **Subject Matter Connections**
  - Interest/passion
  - Importance of topic
How can we make assignments meaningful?

Relevancy
Is your assignment...
... connected to the course material/goals?
... connected to students’ lives and experiences?
... connected to your discipline and its communication conventions?

Audience
Who are students writing for/to?
Engaging with “real” audiences is a key part of meaningful and relevant assignments.

Some example audiences:
- University administrators
- CEO of a relevant tech company
- Readers of the opinion section in a local newspaper
- Prospective UArizona students
Sequencing Assignments & Scaffolding Instruction

**SEQUENCING**
*(within a course)*

Emphasize process and sequence of tasks that build upon each other.

**SCAFFOLDING**
*(within an assignment)*

Divide assignment into manageable low-stakes activities.

Source: Flickr (user: JasmineDelilah)

Source: homedepot.com
Sequencing the Assignment

Example: Environmental Studies course

August

Project # 1
Multimedia Article
(Interview with a public figure—local environmentalist)

Project # 2
Literature review on pressing environmental issue

Project # 3
Report on pressing environmental issue

Project # 4
Action plan for individual action on pressing environmental issue

December

Graphic Inspired by Lindsay Hansen, OIA
## Scaffold the Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>Introduce</strong> assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Share and <strong>analyze models</strong> of successful (and possibly unsuccessful) responses</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Share a list of <strong>resources</strong> for completing the assignment</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Assign students to submit a <strong>proposal</strong></td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Require a <strong>rough version/draft</strong> for feedback/revision</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td><strong>Cover letter</strong> on final draft (highlight process and revisions)</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong> upon receiving final grade/feedback</td>
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**Example: Multimedia Article (Interview with a Public Figure)**

1. **Introduce** assignment
2. Share and **analyze models** of successful (and possibly unsuccessful) responses
3. Share a list of **resources** for completing the assignment
4. Assign students to submit a **proposal**
5. Assign **drafts, mock ups, or storyboards**
6. Regularly **check-in** with students
7. Require a **rough version/draft** for feedback/revision
8. **Cover letter** on final draft (highlight process and revisions)
9. **Reflection** upon receiving final grade/feedback

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Graphic by Lindsay Hansen, OIA
Learning Outcomes and Backwards Design

1. Identify learning intentions: What do we want students to know, understand and be able to do?

2. Evidence of learning: What do we want students to do to provide evidence of their learning?

3. Teaching and learning: Which teaching activities will lead as many students as possible to complete the evidence of learning tasks and questions?

Identifying the tasks and questions is essential for clarifying the learning intentions.

Is there a good articulation between the teaching activities and the tasks and questions?
Learning Outcomes and Backwards Design

WHY IS BACKWARD DESIGN EFFECTIVE?

ALIGNMENT

VISION OUTCOMES FOR LEARNERS

LEADS TO PLANNING ACTIVITIES, RESOURCES & TECH TO SUPPORT

IMPLIES EVIDENCE LEARNERS PRODUCE
Activity: Key Concepts and Breakout Rooms

You will be in breakout rooms, randomly assigned, with a key concept of signature assignments. In your group please do the following:

1) Come up with a definition of this term
2) Come up with examples from assignments you teach or would like to teach
3) Describe potential obstacles/challenges to implementing this key term
4) Post any questions for the large group
Room: Authentic Audiences

Please post notes from your conversation including: questions, resources, ideas, etc.
Room: Relevancy

Please post notes from your conversation including: questions, resources, ideas, etc.
Room: Connections

Please post notes from your conversation including: questions, resources, ideas, etc.
Room: Scaffolding Instruction

Please post notes from your conversation including: questions, resources, ideas, etc.
Resources and Share Out

Want to learn more?

Resources, recordings, and materials can be found on the OIA Webpage

Contact

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- What are some questions, comments, or concerns your group came up with?

- What are some challenges you imagine facing and what support might you need?