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Course Topic Bracket Lesson Plan

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Course Topic Bracket Lesson Plan

Purpose

This lesson plan uses a March Madness style bracket to choose an example course topic in a credit information literacy course. Students propose topics and then vote to narrow them down to the group's favorite. Students then act as research consultants to develop a sample research project on the topic the group selected. The subsequent tasks illustrate research processes for the students. However, students still select individual research topics for their own work.

Note

This activity and the subsequent tasks related the selected topic provide cohesion for the course, give everyone a common theme to discuss as they learn about research processes, and increase student buy-in and enthusiasm. However, this does require more preparation time because the examples the instructor uses must be created anew for each course's chosen topic.

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the characteristics of an effective research topic
- Choose a research topic as a group based on those characteristics

Time Needed

15-20 minutes

Materials

- 2 index cards or pieces of scratch paper for each student
- An online discussion application, such as [Padlet](#) or [Google Jamboard](#), can be used instead of index cards or scratch paper
- An electronic or print bracket document like the image below
- Computer with internet access and projector or document camera
- Bracket could be drawn on a white board or chalkboard if technology is unavailable

Procedure

- Explain purpose of activity to students. Emphasize that this will be the example topic throughout the course and that they will serve as research consultants to make it into a successful research project.
- Also let students know that they will still get to choose individual topics for their own work later.
- Distribute an index card or piece of scratch paper to all students or provide link to an online discussion application.
- Ask students to write down any topic that they would be uncomfortable discussing in class for whatever reason. No names need to be included in the responses. If a student doesn't have any such topics, they can write N/A. This step gives students an opportunity to list any topics that may be triggering for them.

- Share the results of the previous step with the class so that no one later proposes a topic that others have identified as uncomfortable or triggering.
- Brainstorm as a group what makes for a good research topic. These may be characteristics such as: impacts many people's lives, is of interest to many people, relates to current events, is an urgent problem, has many or conflicting solutions, has published research related to it, etc.
- Distribute a second index card or piece of scratch paper to all students or provide link to online discussion application.
- Ask each student to write down a topic they would like to propose for the course, reminding them of the characteristics of a good research topic and the triggering topics mentioned by students. You can add any parameters that make sense for your course, such as requiring that topics be related to a particular discipline. No names are necessary on the suggestions.
- Project a digital copy of the bracket, use a document camera to project a paper copy, or draw the bracket on a white board or chalkboard (before class). Fill out the outer columns of the bracket with students' suggestions. Depending on the number of students, you may need to add a few suggestions of your own, ask students to suggest more than one topic, or—with groups of more than 16—ask pairs of students to suggest a topic together. To have a successful bracket, you will need 2, 4, 8, 16, or 32 topics before you begin voting.
- Students can make a short pitch for their topics as you write them into the bracket—to convince other students that their topic is a good one.
- Go through the bracket, naming 2 topics at a time and asking students to vote for whichever of the 2 they prefer.
- Keep voting until you have selected the winning topic.
- Throughout the rest of the course, use this topic as the example and complete tasks together as a group, with the students serving as research consultants. The following tasks could be completed as a group:
 - Identifying types of literature related to the topic
 - Searching for relevant sources
 - Reading and understanding sources
 - Focusing the topic
 - Writing a research question
 - Finding themes in the literature
 - Making an argument using evidence, etc.

Example of a Bracket

