



## Assignment Design: Questions for Reflection and Conversation

As part of our role in documenting campus experience with the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment has begun to assemble an “assignment library,” a collection of high-quality assignments designed and used by faculty to assess DQP proficiencies which serve as examples to incite faculty to craft their own assignments. Toward this end, we have convened groups of faculty and invited them to share their assignments with one another and work together to refine and improve them. The questions that follow are intended to capture the kinds of issues raised by these faculty members as they talked with one another. We put them forward here in the hopes that they will be useful to others—either as prompts for individual faculty reflection or as “conversation starters” for colleagues working together on their own campuses to improve their assignments.

The list is meant to be suggestive, not comprehensive; it is a work in progress that will be refined and expanded based on suggestions from individuals and groups engaged in work on assignments.

For other resources related to assignment design, see <http://www.assignmentlibrary.org/resources>

The Degree Qualifications Profile specifies five broad areas of proficiency: specialized knowledge; broad, integrative knowledge; civic and global learning; applied and collaborative learning; and intellectual skills. To learn more visit: <http://degreeprofile.org>

### Purpose and Alignment

What is the main purpose of the assignment?

How well does it provide a means for students to exhibit or demonstrate the proficiency you want them to have mastered?

How is the assignment related to course goals? Could that connection be made stronger or more explicit?



How is the assignment related to larger program goals (e.g. outcomes of the major, general education goals, or institution-level learning outcomes)? Could that connection be made stronger or more explicit?

Do students understand these connections? Would it be useful to help them do so? What would that look like?

### **Clarity and Communication**

Is the assignment and its purpose clear to students? (See assignment template, Ewell, 2013).

Does the assignment as written provide sufficient information for students to be able to generate a successful (and scorable) response?

How might students misunderstand the assignment or understand it differently than it is intended?

### **Value for Learning**

What do students learn—or what do you hope they will learn—in responding to the assignment?

Does the assignment push students to a next level of understanding or skill development? If not, could it do so?

Is there an opportunity to open up the assignment to other media and genres of performance? Rather than a traditional research paper intended for the instructor, might it, for instance, be a news article intended for a relevant community of readers? Could it be a group project? A PowerPoint presentation?

### **Scaffolding**

Does the course provide sufficient practice, information, and sequenced activities on the assignment's topic to allow students to be successful?

Does the assignment help to prepare students for subsequent related assignments, in this course and/or beyond?



What kinds of feedback on this assignment are most useful to students? How are opportunities for feedback and revision (or multiple drafts) built into the assignment?

### **Motivation and Engagement**

Is the assignment pitched at the right level of expectation given students' preparation and experience?

Is the assignment likely to motivate students to do their best work? Does it present an “intriguing problem” (Bean, 2011, p. 98)?

How might the assignment be made more engaging for students?

Is the assignment sufficiently challenging? Is it too hard?

### **Assessment Rubrics and Criteria**

What does a “good” student response to the assignment entail or look like?

Do you employ a rubric or explicit set of criteria for evaluating student work on the assignment? Are the criteria for assessing student performance on the assignment clearly aligned with the purpose and goals of the assignment?

Are the criteria for assessing student performance on the assignment sufficiently clear to students?

### **Ongoing Development and Improvement**

Are there aspects of the assignment that you'd like to reconsider or redesign?

What information would be helpful to you in redesigning and strengthening the assignment?

NILOA's Assignment Library was created in response to requests from faculty and campuses seeking examples, models, and templates for assessing DQP proficiencies. Assessment that relies on assignments given by faculty as part of students' regular coursework can help make assessment a more integral part of teaching and learning and therefore more useful for improvement. To access the Assignment Library (and submit a contribution), see [assignmentlibrary.org](http://assignmentlibrary.org)