



Liberal Education & America's Promise



Excellence for Everyone as a Nation Goes to College

Integrating Signature Assignments into the Curriculum and Inspiring Design

What is a Signature Assignment?: Institutions define signature assignments in varying ways in terms of their specific structure or content. The resources listed in this document provide myriad examples of such assignments that illustrate how they can be anything from a case analysis involving real-world mathematical problems that asks students to write about the solution process and the relevance of the work to other issues or disciplines to a service learning experience that applies disciplinary knowledge and includes reflective writing exercises. There are, however, some common features or purposes that bind the various iterations.

Signature assignments require students to demonstrate and apply their proficiency in one or more key learning outcomes. This often means synthesizing, analyzing, and applying cumulative knowledge and skills through problem- or inquiry-based assignments or projects. Signature assignments may also follow a theme across curricular and co-curricular experiences tied to the institutional mission or features of the surrounding community, allowing students to apply their growing knowledge and abilities to meaningful questions over time. At some institutions, all signature assignments must include specific components, such as a “real-world” application, reflective writing, or collaborative work.

The most distinctive feature of signature assignments is the way programs integrate them across the educational pathway to help students demonstrate their growth, make connections across the curriculum and co-curriculum, and apply their knowledge to real world problems.

Why Use Signature Assignments?: Signature assignments that vertically and horizontally span the curriculum create a structure for students to cumulatively build proficiencies throughout their entire undergraduate experience. This design invites students to produce meaningful examples of their learning that document their progress and culminating skills and abilities. Institutions can also use students’ signature work to assess outcomes at the programmatic level, providing a valuable resource for evaluation and institutional change.

How Have Signature Assignments Been Used?: Institutions have embedded signature assignments in the curriculum throughout general education programs, themed pathways, or common intellectual experiences. These reflective, analytical, or creative assignments can unite high-impact practices such as e-Portfolios, diversity and global learning, service learning and internships, capstone projects, and more.

Resources

Although this document is not meant to be a comprehensive authority on the use and design of signature assignments, we have provided some useful resources to inspire both the design and integration of signature assignments for student development and institutional transformation. We consider this to be a “living document” and welcome suggestions for other resources to add to this compilation. Please send suggestions to: toolkit@aacu.org.

Presentation: [*Liberal Education and America’s Promise: Why Focus on Signature Assignments Now?*](#)

Purpose: This presentation provides an overview of the utility of signature assignments in liberal learning to enhance students’ ability to apply their learning to big questions and future problems.
Author: Debra Humphreys

Presentation: [*Developing Effective Signature Assignments: Lessons from the DQP*](#)

Purpose: This presentation makes connections between the provision of signature assignments and the assessment and intentional achievement of student learning outcomes. Specific assignment examples are provided and the application of rubrics and curricular mapping are discussed.
Author: Peter Ewell

Website: [*Salt Lake Community College Faculty e-Portfolio Resources Page*](#)

Purpose: This page provides important resources to faculty about implementing and designing signature assignments across the curriculum and their use in the institution-wide e-Portfolio program to enhance and assess student learning. This resource site has a variety of extremely valuable explanations and examples.

Presentation: [*Using “Signature” or “Key” Assignments for Program-level Assessment*](#)

Purpose: This presentation provides information about using assignments for program-level assessment.
Authors: The University of Hawaii at Manoa Assessment Office: Marlene Lowe and Monica Stitt-Bergh

Website: [*University of Texas’ Signature Course Essentials Sample Documents*](#)

Purpose: This website offers a bank of resources, rubrics, and sample assignments organized by learning outcome.
Authors: University of Texas at Austin, School of Undergraduate Studies

Website: [*NILOA Assignment Library*](#) (not populated as of 4.7.14)

Coming soon: This website will assemble a library of assignment templates aligned to the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) proficiencies.