

AMERICAN HISTORICAL  
== ASSOCIATION ==

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment  
Making Learning Outcomes Usable & Transparent



Lumina™  
FOUNDATION

**2016 Texas Conference on  
Introductory History Courses  
August 5-6, 2016  
San Antonio College**

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# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

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# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

## PURPOSEFUL

What do I want students to gain from this assignment?

Why are those objectives important, valid, and reasonable?

What can I learn from the exercise about my students' learning . . . and share with my colleagues?

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

## COLLEGIAL

**Developed not in isolation, but in discussion**

**Builds from talking with colleagues,  
pursuing shared learning goals,  
filling in skills gaps**

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

## CONNNECTED

Tied to the key course goals you have identified  
and, if possible,

tied to the *other exercises* in the class  
the key *curriculum* goals of a major  
the key *program* goals of Gen Ed  
the key *institutional* goals of a campus

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

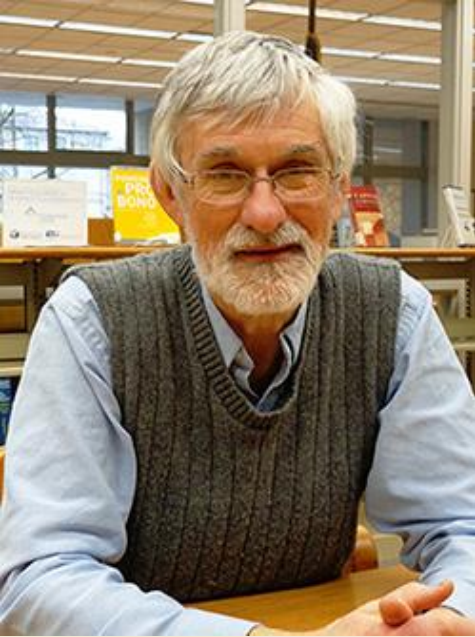
CLEAR

In terms of *instructions*

*(how might a student understand the assignment differently?)*

In terms of *evaluation*

*(what are the components, considerations, and calculations that go into a grade?)*



# David Pace, Indiana University

## DE-CODING THE DISCIPLINES

*Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking*

*(New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 98, Summer 2004)*

<http://www.indiana.edu/~tchsotl/part3/decoding%20pace.pdf>

## How would a discipline expert approach the assignment?

***Explore the steps an expert in the field would go through to accomplish the task in question.***

**Move “the focus from large, potentially overwhelming challenges, . . . to more discrete and manageable tasks.**

**Students’ . . . sense of mastery can increase as they move to ever more complex tasks.”**

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

## SEQUENTIAL

**Occupies a logical place in the students' path through a course or a curriculum**

**Pitched at a reasonable appropriate skill level**



# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

**FLEXIBLE**

**Variable formats**

**Poses a range of disciplinary questions**

**Allows for revisions**

**Open to collaborative work**

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

## OPEN-ENDED

Exercises that engage students in ongoing, significant, engaging debates

Exercises that speak to the *provisional* nature of historical arguments



Carol Geary Schneider, “Afterword,” in Peter T. Ewell, *Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP): Implications for Assessment* (Champaign, IL: National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2013), 25.

**“College must prepare learners to deal with the complex and uncertain, not just with the rote and routine.**

**Assessments [*and our assignments*] ought to show how well students can integrate context, inquiry, evidence, applications, and implications.”**

**Prepare “students to tackle nonstandard, unscripted problems and questions . . . where ‘right answers’ are not known and where the nature of the problem itself is likely uncertain at best, and often actively contested.”**

**Focus on students’ “adaptive and inventive competencies”**

**on what “students can actually do with nonstandard problems . . . , the ultimate test of students’ competence — at work, at life, and in the community.”**

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

## INSTRUCTIVE

**Documents student learning**

**Demonstrates the development of knowledge  
and skills that we can track and report**

*(especially if the assignment is tied to any  
available assessment features in your  
institution's course management system)*



**Peter T. Ewell, *Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP): Implications for Assessment* (Champaign, IL: National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2013), 8.**

**Assessment of student learning:  
From mid-1980s**

- assumed unreliable nature of faculty-awarded grades**
- focused on “add-on” measures (esp. standardized tests)**
- emphasis on *compliance* with mandatory measures**



**Peter T. Ewell, *Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP): Implications for Assessment* (Champaign, IL: National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2013), 8.**

## **Assessment of student learning: TODAY**

- focus on faculty evaluation + actual course work of students**
- “progressively more challenging exercises, performances, and assignments for demonstrating student mastery at multiple points.”**
- emphasis on *learning about student learning***

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

## PRACTICAL

Addresses key *disciplinary* competencies

Offers students a range of *transferable* skills

Helps students construct a more persuasive narrative of their educational experience



# WHAT MAKES A GOOD ASSIGNMENT?

**PURPOSEFUL**

**CONNNECTED**

**SEQUENTIAL**

**OPEN-ENDED**

**COLLEGIAL**

**CLEAR**

**FLEXIBLE**

**INSTRUCTIVE**

**PRACTICAL**

# RESOURCES

## GENERAL INFORMATION ON ASSIGNMENT WORKSHOPS FOR FACULTY:

Organizing Assignment-Design Work on Your Campus: A Tool Kit of Resources and Materials <http://degreeprofile.org/assignment-design-work/>

## EXAMPLES OF ASSIGNMENTS:

DQP Assignment Library <http://www.assignmentlibrary.org/search>

Key features of good assignments

<http://www.assignmentlibrary.org/uploaded/files/Faculty%20Charrette%20Participant%20List%20of%20Other%20Desirable%20Characteristics%20of%20Assignments%20doc.pdf>

## CREATING RUBRICS FOR ASSIGNMENT EVALUATION:

VALUE rubric project (Association of American Colleges & Universities)  
(model rubrics for 16 learning outcomes) <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics>

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## **RESEARCH:**

***Catalyzing Assignment Design Activity on Your Campus: Lessons from NILOA's Assignment Library Initiative***

[http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/Assignment\\_report\\_Nov.pdf](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/Assignment_report_Nov.pdf)

***Designing Effective Classroom Assignments***

[http://degreeprofile.org/press\\_four/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Designing-Effective-Classroom-Assignments-Intellectual-Work-Worth-Sharing-Change-Magazine.pdf](http://degreeprofile.org/press_four/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Designing-Effective-Classroom-Assignments-Intellectual-Work-Worth-Sharing-Change-Magazine.pdf)

## **MATERIAL FROM THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION:**

**AHA Tuning Project: History Discipline Core**

<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning/history-discipline-core>

**Classroom materials: rubrics and syllabi**

<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources/classroom-materials/classroom-materials-rubrics-and-syllabi>

**Classroom materials: sample assignments**

<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources/classroom-materials/classroom-materials-sample-assignments>

## **“DECODING” THE DISCIPLINE:**

**Jean Middendorf, David Pace, “Decoding the Disciplines: A Model for Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking the Reading of History”**

**<http://www.indiana.edu/~tchsotl/part3/Decoding%20Middendorf.pdf>**

**David Pace, “Decoding the Reading of History”**

**<http://www.indiana.edu/~tchsotl/part3/decoding%20pace.pdf>**

**Additional publications by David Pace:**

**<http://decodingthedisciplines.org/david-pace-publications-in-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning/>**