

Creating Culturally Affirming and Meaningful Assignments

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Creating Culturally Affirming and Meaningful Assignments

A Practical Resource for Higher Education Faculty

Edited by Christine Harrington



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Learning Outcomes

Define what it means for an assignment to be culturally affirming and meaningful.

Use "getting to know you" strategies to design assignments.

Identify innovative assignments that demonstrate learning outcomes.

Determine ways to offer assignment choice.

Explain the value of transparency in assignments.

Articulate how to provide assignment support and feedback.

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Backward Design

(Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)



Learning
Outcomes

Assessments

Teaching
Methods

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**Why the Need
for Culturally
Affirming and
Meaningful
Assignments?
A Historical
Context**



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Positionality

"How our identities, values, experiences, and beliefs influence us as instructors."

([Tapia-Fuselier, 2020, para 3](#))

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Creating Meaningful and Culturally Affirming Assignments

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**What does
culturally
affirming mean?**

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Culturally Affirming

"Culturally affirming assignments are learning tasks, endeavors, and exercises that reflect a value for students' cultural identities, acknowledge how content and learning processes are culturally constructed, and uphold cultural diversity as a productive, meaningful, and generative learning asset." (Martin, 2024)

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Culturally Affirming Assignment Principles (Martin, 2024)

Valuing students' cultural identities

- Engage with course materials representing different cultures
- Encourage connections to lived experiences

Acknowledging the ways that culture informs content and learning

- Consider varied funds of knowledge
- Transparently communicate expectations and provide culturally affirming scaffolds

Upholding multiculturalism as a learning asset

- Encourage learning through multiple cultural lenses
- Leverage cultural funds of knowledge

Engaging students relationally

- Get to know students
- Support and feedback

Offering diverse ways for students to demonstrate their learning

- Give choice to enable students to leverage cultural strengths
- Offer reflection opportunities

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**What makes an
assignment
meaningful?**

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Meaningful Assignments

(Arend and Carlson, 2024)



Aligned with
learning
outcomes

Personally
relevant and
culturally
affirming

Challenging,
empowering,
and growth
focused

Authentic with
real-world value

Skill-based and
relevant to world
of work

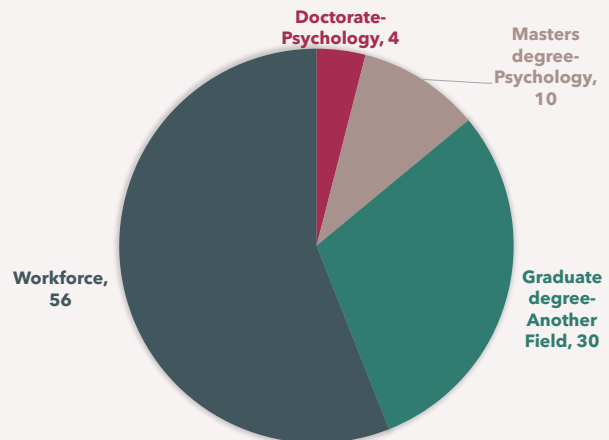
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Evaluating Data and Re-considering Outcomes and Assignments



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PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR GRADUATES



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Getting to Know Your Students

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Power of Relationships

Motivation

- Wilson et al. (2010)

Confidence

- Delfino (2019)

Learning

- Demir et al. (2018)

Success

- Flaherty (2023)

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Getting to Know Your Students

(Strickland-Davis & McMican, 2024)

Before the Semester

- Demographic data
- Email a survey

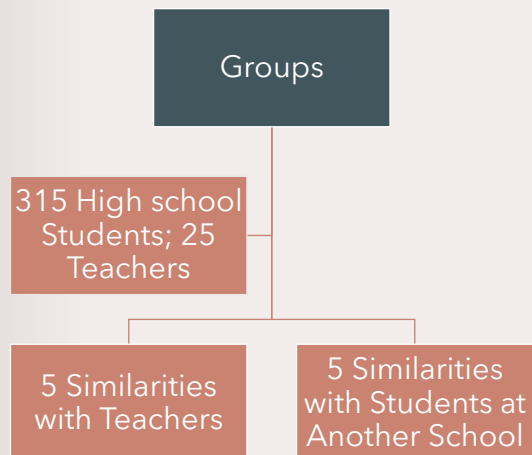
Early in the Semester

- Individual meetings
- Class activities

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Icebreakers: Focusing on Similarities

Gehlbach et al. (2016)



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Icebreakers: Focusing on Similarities

Gehlbach et al. (2016)

Results:

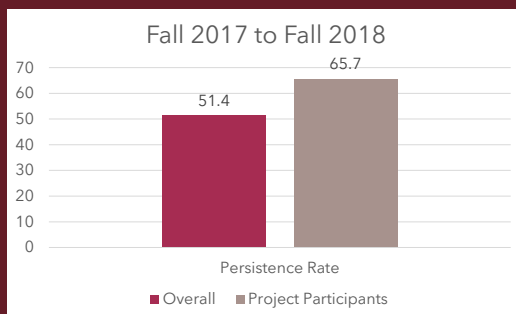
- Student-Teacher Similarity Group:
 - Better Relationships with Teachers
 - Higher Course Grades
 - Closed Equity Gap by 60%; Grade differences between Black and Latinx students and White and Asian students went from .6 to .2

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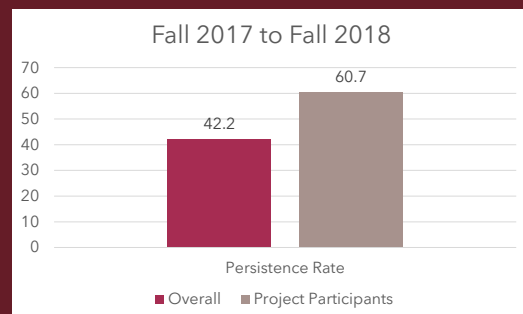
Persistence Project: The 15-minute Meeting

Oakton Community College, Chicago Supiano (2020)

Overall Program



Black Students



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Beyond the Exam: Innovative Assignment Options

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Innovative Assignment Options: James Winfield

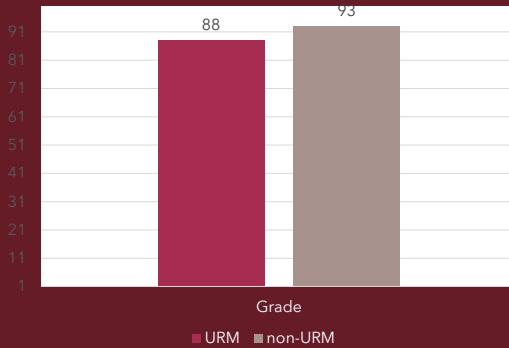


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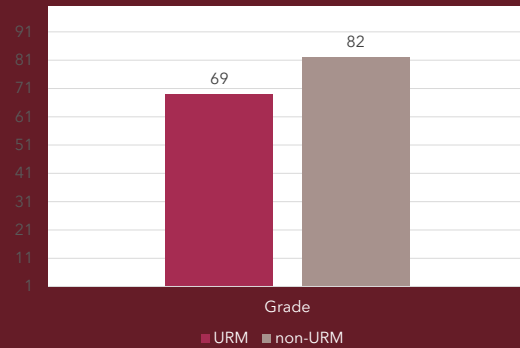
Key Findings: Theatre Appreciation

Singer-Freeman et al. (2019)

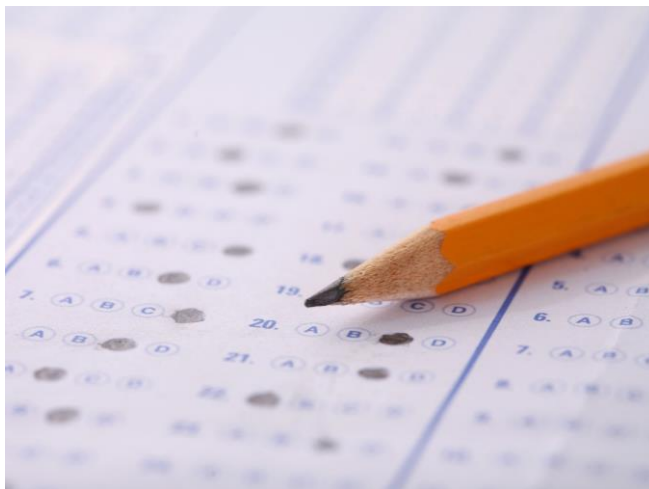
Inclusive Writing



Multiple Choice



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- Exams may not be accurately measuring performance
 - Stereotype threat
 - Test bias
- Exams may not be measuring knowledge and skills needed in careers

(Fuentes et al., 2020; Steele, 2011)

The Problem with Exams

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Source Requirements: Peer-Reviewed Articles?



- Race, ethnicity, and gender not often collected by journals
- Limited data suggests most authors in scientific journals are White males (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/30/science/diversity-science-journals.html>)
- Only 5% of research in cognitive, developmental, and social psychology highlighted race and most authors and editors were White (Roberts et al., 2020)

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Innovative Assignments (Winfield, 2024)

Infographics

Executive
SummariesLightning
Talks or
Pecha KuchaPodcasts or
VideosSocial Media
Posts or
BlogsBook
ReviewsExperiential
Learning
AssignmentsPress
Release

Portfolio

Training
ManualGroup
Projects

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Helping Me Discover My Passion

Genevieve Jaser, Southern Connecticut State University



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Choice

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Why Choice?

(George & Thompson, 2024)

Foster
autonomy and
ownership

Shift power
dynamic

Align with
interests and
goals

Increase
motivation

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Giving Choice Caleb Morris, University of South Carolina



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Types of Choice

(Dabrowski & Marshall, 2018)

Content

- Topic
- Sources

Product

- Format
- Menu

Process

- Due dates
- Individual or Group

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**How do (or
could you)
give choice?**



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Transparency

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Why Transparency Matters

(Wasserman & Ayeni, 2024)



Eliminates
Invisible Pre-
Requisites

Increased
Motivation

Improved
Quality of
Work

Higher Levels
of
Achievement

Increased
Academic
Confidence

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TiLT Approach (Winkelmes, 2013)

Purpose

Steps or Tasks

Criteria

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**Provide Support and
Feedback**

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Providing Support and Feedback: Geneva Murray



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Approaches to Support (Murray & Scafe, 2024)

Tacit and Background
Knowledge

- Assumptions
- Survey

Resources

- Share campus resources

Scaffolded Examples

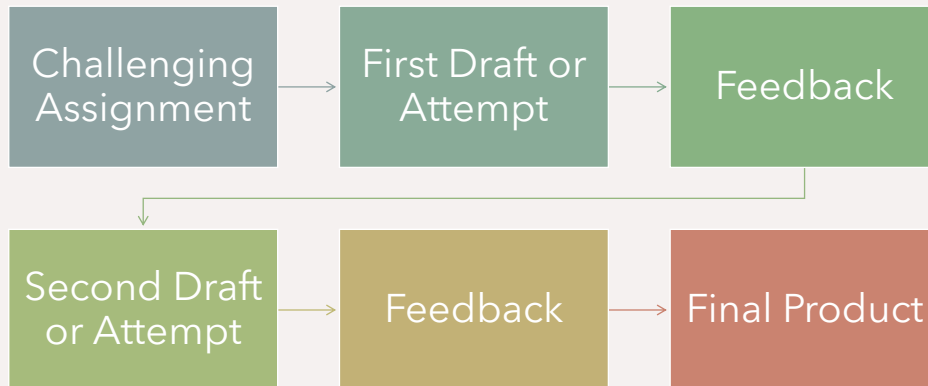
- Demonstrate
- Practice opportunities

Formative
Assessments

- Feedback along the way
- Reflection

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Re-thinking Assignments: An Equity Issue (Taras, 2006)

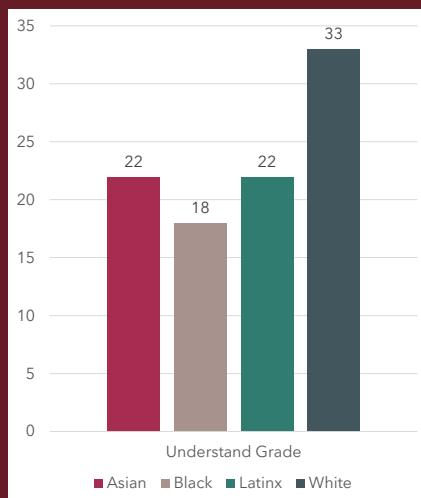


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Grades

Only 25% of students say they “usually understand how my professor grades” (Flaherty, 2023)



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Feedback

Positively Phrased

Constructive

Prompt

Reflection

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**What is a key take-away from today's session?
What is one action you plan to take?**



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THANK YOU

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