Engaging Students with Meaningful & Culturally Affirming Assignments

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1

Getting to Know You

Please introduce yourself in the chat. Include:

- Preferred name and pronouns
- What subject you teach
- What you are hoping to get from today's session
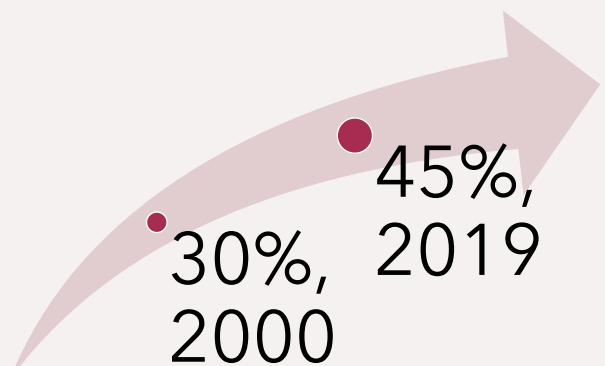
2

Agenda

Positionality and Teaching

Quick Review of Backward Design

Creating Meaningful and Culturally Affirming Assignments

Action Steps

3

Undergraduate Students of Color
Brown (2019)

45%, 2019

30%, 2000

4

Prediction Time

What are the 6-year graduation rates of White, Asian, Hispanic, and Black undergraduate students?

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5

6-year Graduation Rates
Tate (2017)

- Black Males most likely to drop out after first-year
- Brown (2019)

Graduation Rates by Race and Ethnicity

	White	Asian	Hispanic	Black
Value	62	63.2	45.8	38

Graduation

■ White ■ Asian ■ Hispanic ■ Black
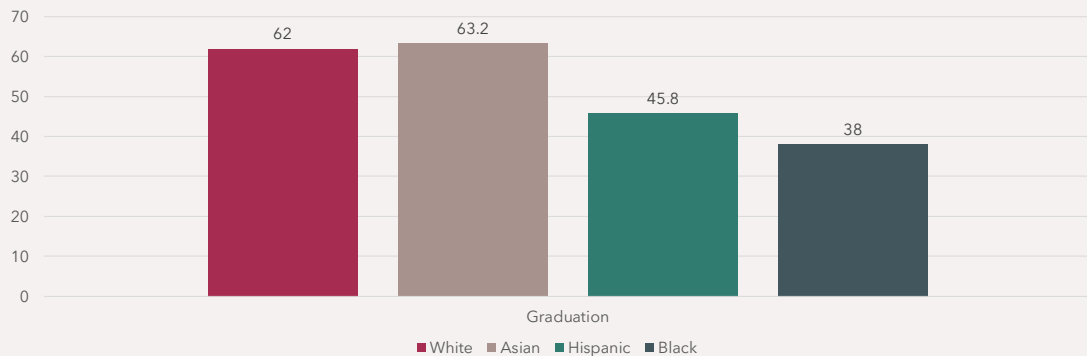
6

Positionality

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

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

7

Privilege

"As I started out, I felt like my feet were wings. I had gone for a longer than-usual run a few days before and decided that must be the cause of my improvement. It's possible that I looked quite slow to anyone who saw me, but by my standards, I was zooming along. The Chariots of Fire theme song was going through my head. I felt like I reached the end of the first mile in no time. My hope had been to run the return route faster than the first mile, and I had no doubt in my mind I would be able to. But then I reached the end of the road and turned around. As I started my run back, I was gasping for breath and had to fight for each step. Remember, the road was pretty flat, so it's not that I was now going uphill. No, what I realized as I ran that first block in the return direction was that I was now running headfirst against the wind. I was aware of that wind every step I took and knew that I had to expend a lot of energy to simply move forward. It was very obvious to me that the wind was an obstacle to my running prowess. It took me a little while to realize, however, that the same wind that was now making it so difficult for me to run had a few minutes earlier been pushing me along on the first half of my run. What I thought was a major breakthrough in my development as a runner was really just nature giving me a push. While I was constantly aware of the wind on the second half of my run, I hadn't noticed it at all on the first half. Instead, in my mind my improved abilities were all because of me. I had thought I was becoming a damn good runner. As I was cooling down, I realized that this experience provides a metaphor for how privilege works in our society. Privilege is like the wind that was pushing me along. It surrounds us and gives some an added push—unearned benefits/advantages—that makes it easier to excel. The person running against the wind never forgets the wind is there. Similarly, many in our society can never forget that it is riddled with racism, sexism, class inequality, heterosexism, ableism, and religious intolerance. At the same time, others of us can go on blissfully unaware that the wind is at our backs. Our society is structured to keep that privilege invisible much of the time, and those with privilege often attribute their success to exactly the kinds of things I was thinking on the first half of my run: my success is because of my abilities, my hard work." (Clifford, 2020, p. 75).

8

Positionality
(Tapia-Fuselier, 2020, para 4)

What are my beliefs about assessing student learning (e.g., grading approaches)?

How should students feel in the classroom? Why?

How are equitable and inclusive learning environments created and sustained?

In what ways do my privileged identities take up space in the classroom? How can I account for this?

As an instructor, in what ways might I perpetuate existing structures of oppression in the classroom? How might I disrupt this?

9

My Positionality

I am a White, middle class, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied female professor who has been teaching, mostly in the community college sector, for over 20 years and has authored 7 books and given talks at over 50 conferences, colleges, and universities.

I believe in a collegial approach to learning and that the deepest levels of learning happen when we challenge and support one another. I believe that every student brings valuable experiences and perspectives to the classroom and that learning is enriched when all voices are heard. I believe that learning takes courage and that we can all grow and learn yet acknowledge that learning environments can and do impact students differently.

I believe there are many ways for students to demonstrate what they have learned, and that learning takes time. As a result, I believe grades should be primarily based on what students have achieved by the end of the semester and that students should be able to choose how to demonstrate their learning. Although I value timeliness, I care more about a student's well-being and acknowledge that life circumstances can sometimes get in the way of meeting deadlines and that school may not be the priority. Consequently, I believe students should be given flexibility with deadlines when needed.

10

Reflection Time

What is your positionality? Hamby (2020)

• Ask yourself: What characteristics orient you in society? Age, gender, race (as a social construct), sexual orientation, gender identity, social class, and health status are some of the key characteristics that will situate almost everyone in their broader social context.

• How do you define yourself? Has that changed over time? Has your awareness of the impact of these characteristics changed over time? Think about how your characteristics may confer power, privilege, or marginalization and ways characteristics can "intersect" with each other to create your unique viewpoint.

11

Creating Meaningful and Culturally Affirming Assignments?

12

Backward Design
(Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)

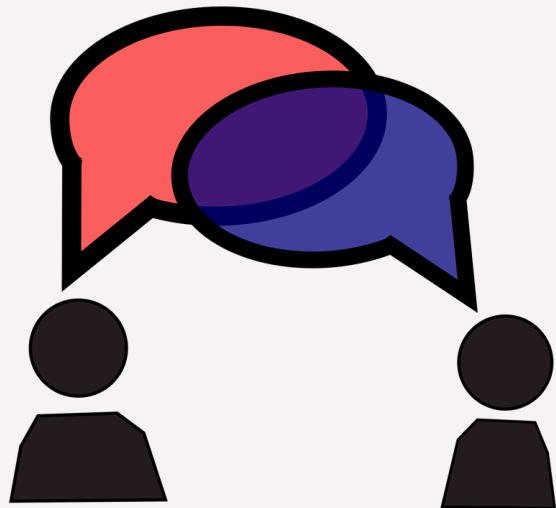| Learning Outcomes | Assessments | Teaching Methods |

13

What makes an assignment meaningful?

14

Meaningful Assignments Require Getting to Know Your Students and Ensuring Assignments have Real-world Value

What does Culturally-Affirming mean?

Culturally Affirming

"Affirming education means that one's background, culture and experiences are viewed with high regard and esteem. Moreover, the educational process is committed to the positive self-concept and racial identity development of students by honoring the legacy, and historical and contemporary contributions of their racial groups."
(Allen et al., 2013, p. 124)

17

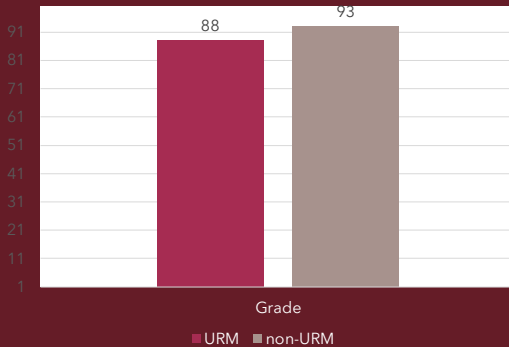## Characteristics of Culturally Relevant Assessments
Singer-Freeman et al. (2019)

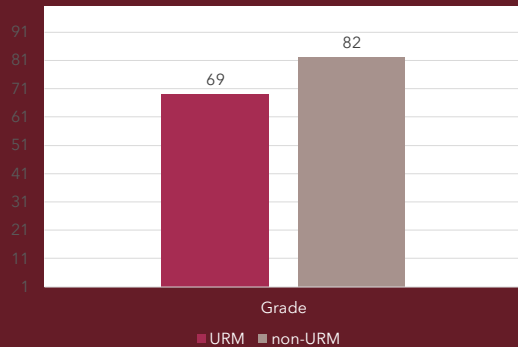| Alignment	Clarity	Scaffolding	Assessment Environment	Inclusive Content
• Strong connection to learning outcomes	• Assignment Details and Rubrics	• Formative Assessments and Support	• Stereotype Threat is Less Likely with Projects and Papers	• Varied Perspectives Represented

18

Key Findings: Theatre Appreciation
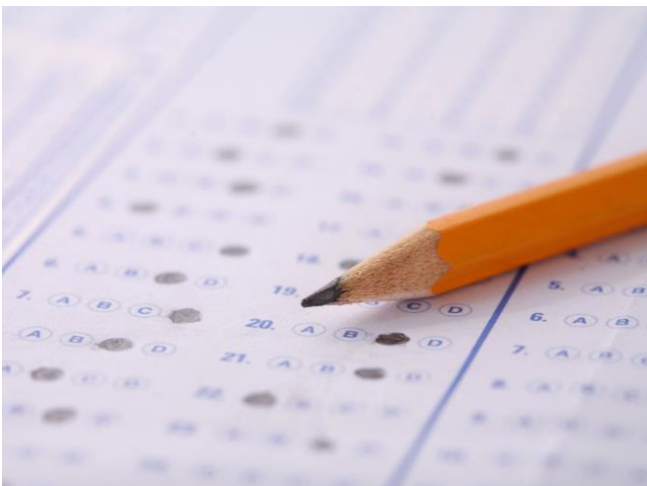**Singer-Freeman et al. (2019)**

Inclusive Writing

88   93

91
81
71
61
51
41
31
21
11
1
Grade
■ URM ■ non-URM

Multiple Choice

69   82

91
81
71
61
51
41
31
21
11
1
Grade
■ URM ■ non-URM

19

- 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)

Consider Alternatives to the Exam

20

Getting to Know Your Students

21

Power of Relationships

Motivation
- Wilson et al. (2010)

Confidence
- Delfino (2019)

Learning
- Demir et al. (2018)

22

"The first thing this professor had us do was create a nameplate and write on a notecard some personal information, like our name, major, minor, where we came from, what we wanted to do, a couple of fun facts about ourselves, why we were taking this class, and what we wanted to get out of it. Throughout the whole class, he kept high spirits and a smile on his face, giving us a little primer on what the class was going to be about. At the end of class, he took a picture of each of us holding our nameplates up and collected the notecards. He told us it was his goal by the next class to know each of our names. I thought for sure he was joking. I knew he had at least 100 students in all his classes. But sure enough, by the next class, he came up to me, called me by name, and asked about my second major (business) and we talked about the applications of psychology to business, as well as my involvement on the swim team (one of my fun facts). "

Getting to Know Me
Rosalyn Stoa, University of Wisconsin

23

Getting to Know You Pecha Kucha Shadiquah Hordge

24

"He took the time to get to know each student during the class period. For example, he would take polls of your interests on certain topics and then, the night before each class, he would adjust his PowerPoints to customize each of his lectures, ensuring the examples would be of interest to certain students or fit the majority interest. With each student, he attempted to find an area of interest related to the topics of the class. Subsequently, he would send you an email with an article relating to that topic and paragraphs of his own thoughts. This almost weekly email from him continuously kept me engaged in the class.."

Tapping into Student Interests
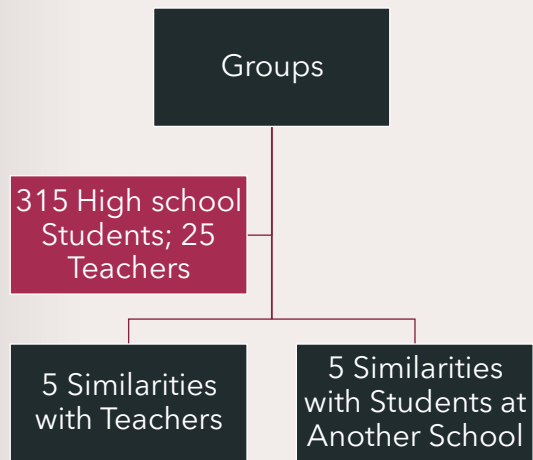**Michael Daidone, College of the Holy Cross**

25

Engaging Student Survey, Aditya Shah, Princeton University

26

Icebreakers: Focusing on Similarities

Gehlbach et al. (2016)

Groups

315 High school Students; 25 Teachers

5 Similarities with Teachers

5 Similarities with Students at Another School

27

Icebreakers: Focusing on Similarities Gehlbach et al. (2016)
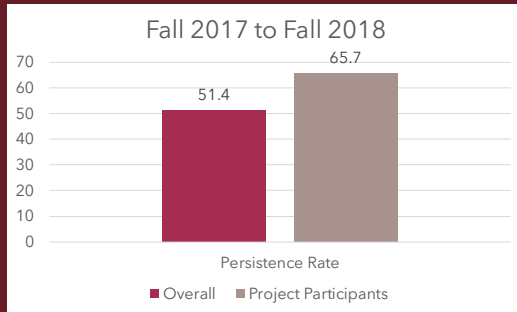
Results:

- 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
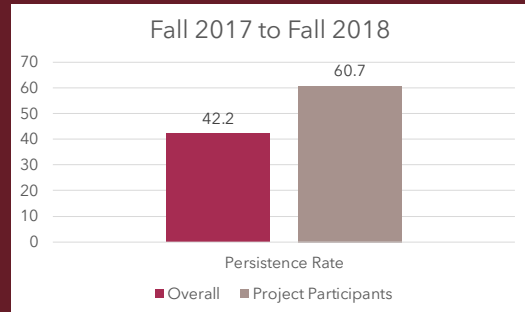
28

14

Persistence Project:
The 15-minute Meeting
Oakton Community College, Chicago   Supiano (2020)

Overall Program

Fall 2017 to Fall 2018

51.4   65.7

Persistence Rate
■ Overall ■ Project Participants

Black Students

Fall 2017 to Fall 2018

42.2   60.7

Persistence Rate
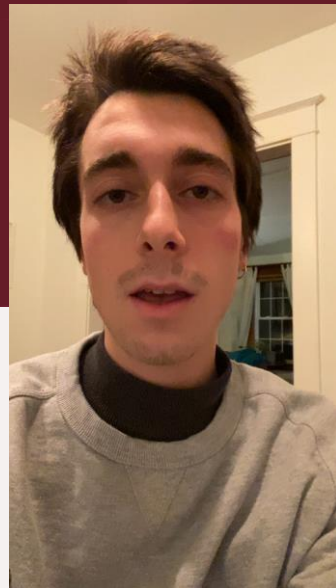■ Overall ■ Project Participants

29

How do you get to know your students?

CHAT NOW

30

Engaging Assignments: Student Perspectives

31

A Note-Card Activity, Benjamin Sackler, College of Charleston

32

"In this class, the instructor assigned a group project that required students to research an organization. Before starting the project, the instructor asked students to share what type of career they wanted to pursue. Each student was then placed into a team based on their career interests. Students also had to complete modules to learn interpersonal skills that would be helpful for teamwork. After each team member completed the modules, each team was asked to elect a leader, assign roles to the remainder of the team members, and agree on rules for the project."

Online Group Project
Edwin S. Lee, San Jose State University

33

"The small group work in this class involved partnering with Syrian newcomer families to organize events with them, which ranged from going to the Syrian families' homes to bowling, to cooking meals and playing games in a park. For professors seeking to engage students in collaborative learning experiences that extend into the community, I suggest you have students work together closely. Get them talking in small groups, put them in situations outside of their comfort zone, and give them tasks and responsibility. When you do these things, students will form bonds and friendships because they are forced to rely on each other. This, in turn, deepens learning. Sending students out into the community to work on projects is exciting, new, and challenging and provides motivation to work hard."

A Community-Based Learning Experience
Rosemary Brockett, Wilfred Laurier University

34

"In an Organization and Finance class, Professor Yancey Gulley, challenged us to create a mock proposal to either change an existing program or process or create an entirely new program or process in our respective departments. I work full time in a career development office. I developed a proposal to move this function from the Career Development office to the Office of Human Resources, where it better aligns with their mission and existing resources. This is something our office has tried to do in the past, but these efforts were not previously successful. This assignment was engaging for me because it was practical rather than hypothetical. It empowered and motivated me to create a proposal that had the chance of making an actual change at the university. My full-time position at the university is entry level, and if I did not have this assignment, I would not have felt qualified to create the proposal."

Developing a Proposal
Carrie Hachadurian, Western Carolina University

35

**Creating Sexual Education Curriculum, Kaitlynn Ely, Muhlenberg College**

36

Collaboration and Learning

- Facilitates deeper levels of learning (Durham et al., 2018; Swanson et al., 2019)
- But….
  - 68% of community college students who completed the SENSE survey reported they NEVER worked with a classmate outside of class
  - 22% reported NEVER working with other students during class
  (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010)

37

What student examples resonated with you? How were they meaningful and culturally affirming?
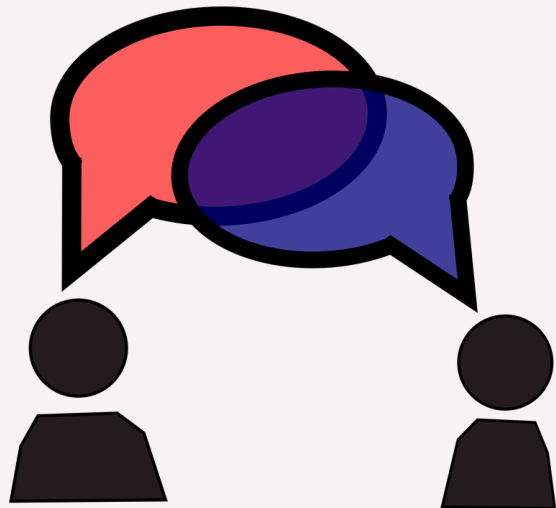
38

Choice

39

Choosing Assignments, Caleb Morris, University of South Carolina

40

"As is customary, the very first day of Children's and Young Adult Literature, Professor Giunta went through the class syllabus: weekly process journal, four mini-essays, three presentations, a larger reflective essay, and a revised final project. Immediately, I jumped to the conclusion that this professor wanted to stuff as much busy work as she could down our throats before we escaped her clutches. While I was making this silent judgment, she explained the nature of the final project. We would be writing a summative document drawing from all the expertise and knowledge accumulated in class, and, furthermore, we could pick what type of essay we wished to write. On paper, these two statements don't look revolutionary, but they are because they established two important concepts in my mind: All class material is pertinent to my final goal and I can guide this project in a personally relevant way. The workload did not change, but now I believed that the assignments would be meaningful and worthwhile. One recommended format for the final project was the creative essay of a fictional story. I chose this option."

Creative Essay Portfolio
Julie Bechtel Patino, New Jersey City University

41

"In one of the first assignments, we had to introduce ourselves through a brief speech. When I introduced myself and included that I'm also Mexican, Native American, and a lesbian, Professor Hankins didn't even blink an eye throughout the entire speech. Instead, my introductory speech was met with smiles and enthusiasm for being so open and speaking in such an eloquent way. From introductory speeches to persuasive and informative ones, we had free reign to explore topics and pick something we were passionate about."

Finding My Voice
Kara Infelise, Gateway Technical College

42

Structure
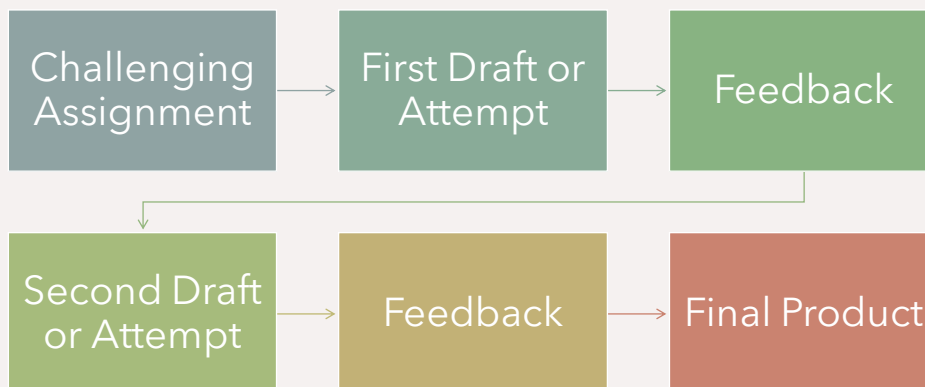
43

Structure and Success
Sathy and Hogan (2019)

- "The more structure, the better for all students. "
- "Too little structure leaves too many students behind. "

44

22

Feedback and Grading Considerations
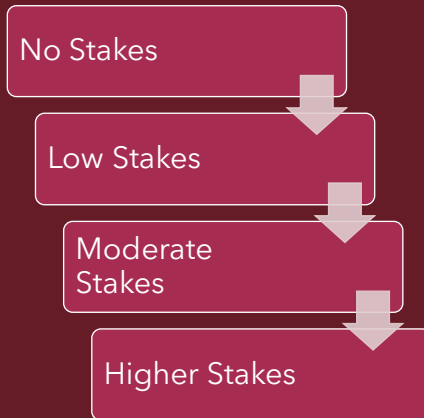
45

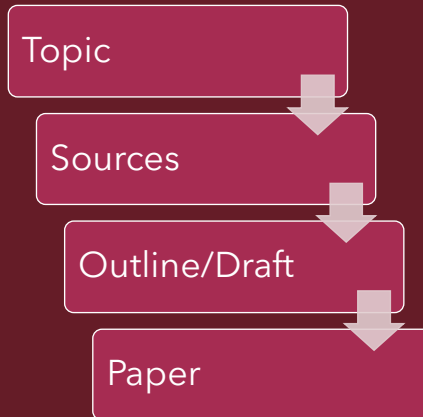## Re-thinking Assignments:
An Equity Issue
(Taras, 2006)

| Challenging Assignment | → | First Draft or Attempt | → | Feedback |

| Second Draft or Attempt | → | Feedback | → | Final Product |

46

46

Scaffolding Assignments

Low-High Stakes to Build Self-Efficacy	Breaking Down Assignments to Benefit from Feedback

No Stakes

Low Stakes

Moderate Stakes

Higher Stakes

Topic

Sources

Outline/Draft

Paper

47

47

Feedback: Linking Assignments?

Rough Draft

Individual Paper

Power Point Slides

Presentation
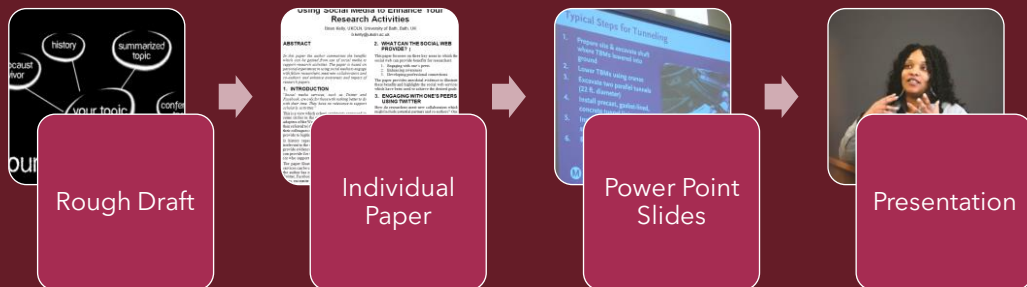
48

48

"My professor designed the final project to be completed throughout the semester by making pieces of it due on certain weeks leading up to the final date. This gave us the opportunity to complete the assignment one part at a time and receive feedback at each point. After the first assignment, she gave thorough feedback on what we could improve on for the next phase of the assignment. This approach really helps us gain confidence and skills."
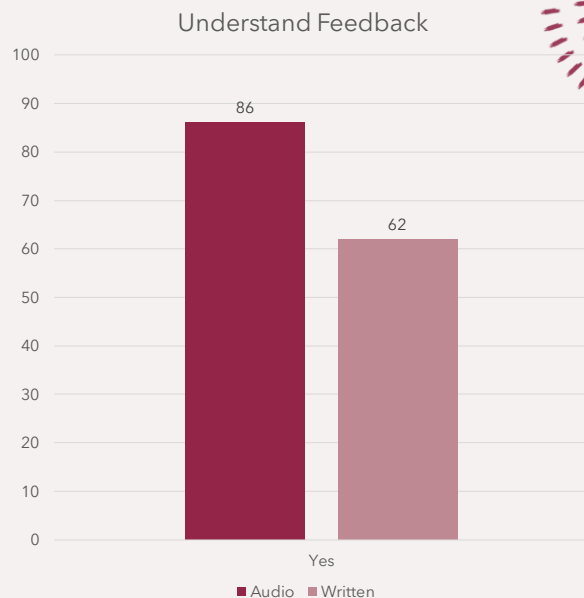
Breaking Down a Major Assignment
Kayla Jasper, Temple University

49

Do Students Understand our Feedback?

Voelkel and Mello (2014)

Understand Feedback

	Audio	Written
Yes	86	62

50

Foster Growth Mindset by Emphasizing Effort and Strategies

Developing a Growth Mindset

51

Reinforcing Strengths, Christina Christodoulou Drew University

52

Does the final grade tell the story of whether students achieved the learning outcomes?

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53

**Late Work Policies
Pasadena City College, Bombardier (2019)**

Improved Grades, especially for Latinx students

54

Ask Yourself...

- How does this policy affect the learning process and achievement of learning outcomes?

- How does the policy affect different groups of students? Does it promote equity and fairness?

- What messages do your policies send?

- Where did this policy come from? What purpose does the policy serve? Is it necessary?

Harrington & Thomas (2018)

55

Reflection Time

- How can you increase formative assessment opportunities so students can learn from feedback?

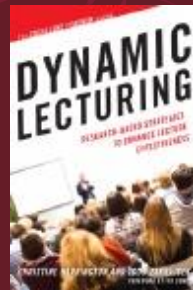- What changes might you make to your grading or late work policies?
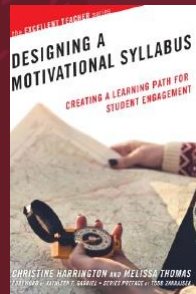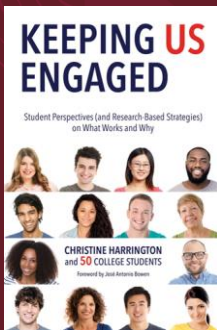

56

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

CHAT NOW

57

KEEPING US ENGAGED
Student Perspectives (and Research-Based Strategies) on What Works and Why
CHRISTINE HARRINGTON and 50 COLLEGE STUDENTS
Foreword by José Antonio Bowen

DESIGNING A MOTIVATIONAL SYLLABUS
CREATING A LEARNING PATH FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
CHRISTINE HARRINGTON and MELISSA THOMAS

DYNAMIC LECTURING
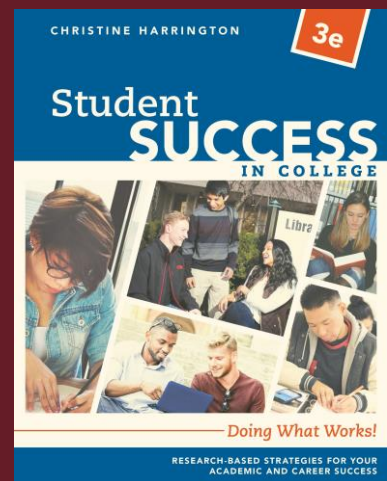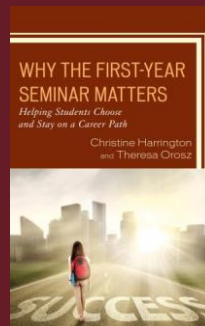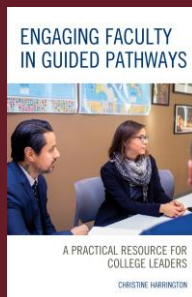RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE LECTURE EFFECTIVENESS

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WHY THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR MATTERS
Helping Students Choose and Stay on a Career Path
Christine Harrington and Theresa Orosz

58

29