

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Structured Summaries Accompany Assigned Readings to Ensure Completion

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

For many discussion-based courses, completion of assigned reading prior to class is a necessary prerequisite for effective discourse. This sociology instructor assigns weekly reading summaries to increase student preparation and engagement with course content.

Each reading summary is aligned to a chapter in the course textbook and is composed of three sections. The first section entails writing a brief overview of the chapter consisting of two five-sentence paragraphs and a list of 10 new terms. The second section asks students to describe five novel concepts in their own words using the 10 new terms. In the final section, students practically apply the information by generalizing concepts to either their own lives or to real-world contexts. The instructor gives students a rubric and a completed example to model expectations, ensuring students are prepared to turn in high-quality work.

As the purpose is to prepare students for in-class activities, chapter summaries are due the same day as the aligned readings. Students submit assignments at the beginning of class and late work is not accepted. Weekly email notifications are sent to students with missing summaries. Since reading summaries are worth 25% of the overall grade, the instructor meets privately with students missing multiple assignments to discuss the implications of continued oversight as well as strategies to increase academic success. Additionally, the instructor reviews completed course summaries to identify common misconceptions and questions about the content, directing instruction to address these issues.

This instructor noted an increase in student engagement as demonstrated by an increase in meaningful participation. Students are more likely to initiate conversation while questioning, commenting, and challenging their peers to continue the dialogue. They also demonstrate a deeper understanding of course content through improved assessment scores and frequent practical application of learned concepts.