

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Course Offers Wide Variety in Assignments and Asks for Commitment

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

At the beginning of the semester, students commit to several assignments and sign a contract committing to complete all of them.

Two of the assignments involve independent research. For one assignment, students choose a topic related to the course learning outcomes, research that topic, and write an eight- to 10-page paper, complete with a bibliography. Another independent research assignment requires students to choose a topic related to the course learning outcomes that relates to them personally or has touched them in some way in class. Students will research this topic, write a three- to five-page paper, and deliver a 10-minute presentation to the class in a discussion circle. Students must dedicate time within those 10 minutes to respond to questions from the rest of the class. Students may choose to lengthen their paper to eight to 10 pages in lieu of giving a class presentation.

Another assignment integrates independent research and behavior change. Students choose a behavior that they would like to change (e.g., weight gain, smoking, poor sleeping patterns). This is a semester-long assignment. At the beginning of the semester, students research the topic and write a five- to seven-page literature review. Students then develop a behavior change plan that includes their goals, strategies, supplies, modifications to their environment, and nutritional analyses. Throughout the semester, students must keep a reflection journal documenting their successes, failures, barriers, and revelations.

The contract also includes an assignment specifically focused on critical thinking. The instructor chooses a book for the students to read. After finishing the book, students write a three- to five-page reflection paper about how the content of the book relates directly to them.

One last assignment engages students in a 10-hour service-learning project of their choosing. Students can complete this project at any point during the semester. Upon completion, students write a three- to five-page reflection paper on the experience.