

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Preparation for Group Essay Assignment

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

Student grades in this anthropology course are based in part on a set of essays addressing content covered during the previous several weeks. For each essay, the students are given an essay prompt and six topics related to the content for that section of the course. The prompt and six topics are given to the students the day prior to starting the essay assignment in class.

When students arrive in class on the day they start working on the essay, they are randomly assigned to groups of three or four. The six topics are written on white boards around the room, and groups are assigned to each topic as a starting point. Students are instructed to think about the topic and briefly discuss it. After a few minutes of discussion, teams write relevant points in color-coded bullet lists from their class notes (black ink), textbook (blue ink), and other supplemental materials (red ink). Students are given 10 to 15 minutes to accomplish this and then they rotate to the next topic and repeat the process until they have reviewed all six topics. As the groups work through each subsequent topic station, they can add relevant bullets that previous teams had not listed. Each group will select four of the six topics to include in their essay. This process is intended to give students the opportunity to collaborate, think critically about the topics, and integrate information from different sources. Students are encouraged to take a picture of the boards. The next step is for teams to produce an essay outline which will be used to write the final essay.