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Developing New Assignments and Activities

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Suggested Instructions: Below are five main areas of assignments/activities that integrative courses often use: Creative Assignments, Meta-cognition (reflection on one's own learning), assignments/activities that help students understand their own professional development, assignments/activities that help students relate course material to personal experience, and greater variety of peer-to-peer interaction. These four areas are also often mentioned in the research literature as useful for integrative pedagogy. Some of these sections include tips as well.

While many instructors have likely tried some or many of these activities, for this exercise, please pick 1-2 activities from any of these five lists that you think would be valuable and that you have *not* tried before. Make notes on how you might adapt this activity for your class in ways that help students integrate your course topics with their own lives or with other fields of study.

While some of the examples offered are generalizable, some are simply specific examples that might offer an idea of the kinds of activities to brainstorm about.

Please select one or more of the following categories for developing new course content:

- [Creative Assignments](#)
- [Course assignments that also relate to professional development for students](#)
- [Meta-cognition/reflecting on learning](#)
- [Drawing on students personal experiences](#)
- [More variety of peer-to-peer interactions](#) (this option is specifically for online/hybrid courses)

When you have completed this work based on one these sections, please proceed to [Planning](#).

Creative Assignments

- Remix a course material (in creative writing or visual art/music/video/etc.) to create something new (e.g., a version of an ancient myth set in the modern day)
- Write a story in which you speculate about how a course concept might change in the future, and then reflect on your story citing course materials or research sources
- Create a concept map to illustrate how course concepts relate to one another
- Create an online comic that illustrates why a concept or event is more complex than some people realize
- Take a popular meme and use it to express what you think of a character's actions in a novel
- Write a letter from one author/philosopher/artist/filmmaker/etc. to another, discussing what they have in common and where they differ
- Write a letter or journal from the perspective of a person in the historical period you're studying (or book character) who is often overlooked
- As a group, tell a story from popular culture (Harry Potter, Star Wars, etc.) in the style of a particular author, by drawing a picture using three characteristics of this artistic style, writing a poem in this meter, etc.
- Tell a story about a course concepts using three images (images that symbolize key ideas, not depictions of the people or things in question); feel free to use memes/emojis/etc. Accompany the images with writing or an audio recording to explain why you used the three images.
- On a website (Tumblr, Wordpress, etc.), create an online exhibit or online curation of examples from news media or popular culture that relate to a course topic; accompany each item with a brief analysis that uses course concepts or course materials to discuss the item.
- Make a creative work that makes an argument and accompany with an Artist's Statement that explains the 'thesis.'
- Research a concept and then design a creative way to teach MSU students (or middle school children, for a different audience) about this concept
- Design a museum exhibit about a course topic, explaining why you made your decisions using course materials
- If you were to make a documentary film about this topic, what would the title be? How would you start the film to grab the audience's attention? What footage would you use to convey why this topic matters to people? What specific example would you go in depth in analyzing? Why did you make these choices?
- At the end of the class: Make a creative work of any kind that expresses what you found most interesting or significant in the class; your work should express something about your own thoughts or connection to the material and not just convey factual information (i.e., a drawing of a building should try to say something about your connection to the building)

Creative Assignment Tips:

1. Ask students to write a brief reflection paragraph explaining their intentions with the creative work, what decisions they made and why, how the creative work participates in conversations about your course's subject matter, etc. This will allow them to feel that they can tell you what went into their project and give you more concrete criteria for grading.
2. Grading might be based on how the creative work participates in conversations about course material and a reflection/memo about their artwork and not at all on artistic 'quality' such as writing ability, drawing ability, etc.
3. It is usually best to give several options for a creative assignment that is graded as a formal assignment, since many students will claim that they are "not creative"; either the creative option can be one of several possibilities, or the assignment can offer the choice of different creative formats (short story, video documentary, drawing, collage, knitting, 3-D printing, infographics, a video-recorded puppet show, etc.).

Professional development

Possible assignments

- Direct students to: Research a career field that is interesting to you: what is the background of that person? Did they have a straight path to get there? What different academic fields might contribute to conversations that are important to this field - and how does this course's subject matter relate to this field?
- In group projects, help students understand the benefits and challenges of working with a group, and ask them to reflect after on what they learned about collaboration; consider emphasizing along the way that collaboration, including online collaboration, will be necessary in most of their careers.
- Writing assignment topics:
 - How might the learning goals of this course relate to your future career?
 - How will course concepts like inclusivity, diversity, or globalization relate to your future field?
- Direct students to: Develop your elevator pitch: can you describe who you are and what your interests are in 30 seconds? 15 seconds? 5 seconds? How might this type of conversation relate to our class discussions on identity/the value of skills developed in this class (communication, contextualization, critical thinking, etc.)?
- Direct students to: Create an ePortfolio for the work you do in this class.
- After working on a project that requires information literacy skills, ask students to explore how knowing about information literacy could have a positive effect on their future career or other aspects of their lives (health, relationships, family, hobbies, etc.).

- For arts and humanities and adjacent fields: Ask students to review this list of transferable skills and identify how the items on the list relate to their personal experience or future goals: *Students with experience in the arts and humanities have the ability to:*
 - Write clearly and convey information concisely
 - Collect, organize, and evaluate ideas
 - Critically analyze and assess complex concepts
 - Think logically
 - Think creatively and problem solve
 - Be adaptable through good social and citizenship skills
 - Work as part of an effective and collaborative team
 - Be innovative to think of new ways to make something work more efficiently
 - Manage competing priorities
 - Quickly learn and apply new skills
 - Be inquisitive by examining things and conceiving ways to make them better

Metacognition

Metacognition helps students learn to think more reflectively and productively about their own thinking and learning, which empowers them to be lifelong learners, and, research suggests, solidifies their learning of course material.

Class activities to develop metacognition

- Quick informal journaling at start of each class or each week's online discussion asking them to reflect on what they learned last time or something to prepare them for the class ahead.
- Think-pair-share around any number of course-related topics or questions.
- Letter to future students of the class to showcase their own growth in the class, where they describe what is to be expected in the course, what incoming students can expect to learn, and any advice on how to be successful.
- Assign a brief reflection as a cap to a large assignment or at the end of class, asking specific questions about what they learned/discovered/practiced and how that learning might be applicable elsewhere
- Ask students to reflect on how learning in the course's discipline(s) is similar or different to the learning they have done in courses in other areas of study
- For a class where some students find some topics uncomfortable or controversial, ask them to reflect on: What do you think makes a conversation difficult? What is the difference between a productive difficulty and a difficulty that hinders conversation?
- Look back at the online discussion of this past unit. Which comments from peers in online discussion had the biggest impact on you? Why?
- Interview others about _____ and then write a reflection on how the interviews affected your understanding of this concept.

- Synthesize your own contributions to online discussion for this past unit. What key threads seem to emerge out of your posts and responses? How do these threads reflect your own interests or what you value?

Tips on metacognition

- Be intentional and explicit about teaching metacognitive skills.
- Explicitly model metacognitive thinking.
- Encourage goal setting among your students.
- Build in ways for students to stop and reflect on what they are doing in class.
- Emphasize the importance of learning versus getting the correct answer.
- Ask students to identify either the muddiest, most interesting, or most relevant point(s).
- Link the purpose of an assignment to course objectives and professional skills.

Links for more resources on metacognition

- <http://academicaffairs.arizona.edu/metacognition>
- <https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/metacognition>
- <https://lsa.umich.edu/content/michigan-lsa/sweetland/en/instructors/teaching-resources/cultivating-reflection-and-metacognition.html>

Drawing on Students' Personal Experience

- Ask students to talk about their own knowledge of language use, visual culture, advertisements, songs they like, etc., in relation to a course concept, to show that they have much more knowledge of the academic topic than they had realized (analyzing artistic or political aspects of a favorite song, for example)
- Ask students to relate specific course materials to their own experiences. Examples:
 - The essay for this week suggests _____. What in your own experience might confirm or contradict this assertion?
 - Identify one way that you may have benefited from globalization processes and one way that your life may have been negatively affected by globalization processes
 - The short story we just read lists rules that the young main character is supposed to live by. Write a 1-paragraph story listing the things you were often told growing up, then write a paragraph reflecting on how these statements you heard might have shaped your identity.
 - The readings discuss a situation in which a group of people tried to ignore or forget something that happened in the past. Discuss a time in your own experience, or in a community of which you are a part, seemed to want to forget something that you thought was important to remember. What does your example reveal about the stakes of community memory?

- How might this particular course concept shed light on an experience that you've had?
- Ask students to talk about one of their own life experiences in the style of an author/draw an experience in the style of an artist/etc.
- Ask students to do an 'online scavenger hunt' to find ways that a course concept relates to various fields of study, various aspects of life, etc., providing a specific list of things to find, or a scavenger hunt of objects in *their own surroundings* that relate to course material (e.g., in a history course, they could find and take a picture of an object influenced by Gutenberg, an object influenced indirectly by the work of Newton, etc.)
- Ask students to discuss a time when they were excited to learn something and use that experience to narrow the paper/project topics
- Ask students to reflect on previous group work and offer suggestions on how they want their upcoming group projects to work
- Ask students to talk about their own experiences in relation to the learning goals of the class
 - Example: Discuss a time when communication skills helped or hindered you from obtaining something that was important to you, then set some goals for yourself for what communication skills you would like to practice or improve this semester.

Tips for Drawing on Students' Personal Experience

- Be careful of how diverse student experiences may affect the assignment; asking students to talk about family history, for example, can be very fraught for some students. Asking students to talk about their own gender, for example, may be a complex topic for some as well. Consider offering options, for example allowing students to either talk about their own experience or do research on a topic, so that they have alternatives.
- Make sure your syllabus states that there are some experiences (sexual abuse or sexual harassment, for example) that you are required to report; you can remind them of this if these experiences are likely to come up in a discussion.
- If you do not feel personally comfortable asking for student experiences, that's obviously fine; as with anything, go with your own comfort level and instincts.

More variety of peer-to-peer interaction (if the course is online)

- Interviewing one another about experiences
- Group work/projects: collaborative writing, media creation
- Social media platforms
- Up voting answers of classmates to be used for future discussions
- Asking students to summarize the last two weeks' discussion, reflecting on the most interesting parts, what surprised them about the conversation, etc.
- Peer review of assignments for purposes of revision
- Using multiple due dates for peer responses (some peer responses for the same post due on different days) to encourage responding back to the responses

- Option to create videos for individual posts
- Collaboratively creating a study guide or research guide for the class, especially before an exam or research project
- Asking students to pose discussion questions to peers
- Asking students to collaborate to define civility or classroom etiquette for the course
- Asking students to collaborate to create a grading rubric for a big assignment (with you providing the learning goals of the assignment, and of course you would have veto power)
- Asking students to collaborate to suggest course materials and/or select from a list you provide, then provide justification for the team's decision
- Curation project: students collaborate to find or curate examples from popular culture or from social media, and provide analysis of these examples and/or draw conclusions based on these examples
- Games and gamifying
- Students find and choose an article related to the course topic, then discuss the article with peers in a google doc or in a recorded Zoom conversation or group chat; this peer discussion then fulfills the assignment requirements
- Service learning group project options and community-based learning

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