

# AMERICAN HISTORICAL — ASSOCIATION —

## **Suggestions for Assignments Charrette Staff: Facilitators and Recorders**

Our goals for this workshop are to practice collaborative methods for refining great assignments, and to generate specific ideas for further faculty work on history teaching, especially in relation to student learning through assignments at the introductory collegiate level.

The presenters have all written 1-page memos about their assignments and will have five minutes to concisely summarize and provide additional context to frame discussion of their work with colleagues. By the end of the 5-minute introductory statement, each Charrette member should have a clear understanding of the following:

1. Course location within the curriculum
2. Student demographics (level, major/non-major), etc.
3. Student motivation for taking the course
4. Ways assignment fits into course content
5. Proficiencies being assessed
6. Experience with assignment
7. Particular challenges faced by students
8. Questions for colleagues

### **Suggestions for facilitators:**

After the oral introduction, make sure the presenter has addressed the 8 points above in at least cursory form.

Be prepared with a few questions or probes to use should conversation be slow to start. Be willing and ready to restate or summarize major points to help the presenter stay relaxed and keep the conversation in constructive territory.

Keep the conversation moving when it drifts or seems overly redundant.

You and every other presenter should fill out a feedback form at the end of each presentation. The recorder/secretary may fill one out, but does not need to—it might be more productive to spend this time going over notes. Make sure that each presenter collects all of the feedback forms at the end of his or her allotted time.

### **Suggestions for facilitator questions to have ready if needed:**

- What are specific qualities and characteristics that highlight the strengths or weaknesses of this assignment?
- What does this assignment look like from the student perspective?
- Do students have a clear understanding of what is expected and how they will be graded?
- How appropriate is this assignment based on the level of students in the class?
- How is this assignment part of a growth process for students?
- What are students expected to learn by doing the task? (Not just: What are they demonstrating by completing the assignment?)
- This assignment is worth X% of the grade. What else do students do in the course that will increase the likelihood that they will be successful?
- What opportunities do students have for practice, feedback, and refinement?
- Is this a 'high stakes' assignment? Are there examples for partial credit? Does the student's experience in the discipline make a difference?
- What would a response from a more advanced student completing this assignment look like?
- If the class has students at various levels and interests (beginning, mid-level and seniors/ majors/non-majors) are all held to the same standard?
- What would a capstone paper look like, and how are these different from responses to a research paper or primary-source analysis in an introductory class?
- Is the language clear? Is the format easy to understand? Are there components that are either missing or extraneous, given what the instructor wants students to do?

### **Suggestions for recorders:**

Keep time for the group. Oral intro by presenter - 5 minutes; Discussion -15 minutes; writing feedback - 5 minutes. (Anne Hyde, Josh Reid, and Elaine Carey only have 4 presenters, so you can take extra 3-4 minutes in discussion and 1 minute on the written feedback in those groups.)

Please take written notes on the discussion (do not make an audio or video recording). Pay attention not only to the concerns that arise in multiple discussions, but also to the broader themes and ideas that seem to be emerging across the group. Some keywords that I thought I saw while reading the assignments included: **imagination, narrative, past/present, meta-cognition, empathy, scaffolding analytical writing, identifying significant questions and generating research strategies, conflicting sources, and civic contexts for history education.**

The facilitator and every other presenter should fill out a feedback form at the end of each section. As the recorder, you may but do not need to fill out a feedback form—it might be more productive to spend this time adding to/going over your notes.

After the small group discussions, you will have 25 minutes to confer with other recorders and distill the lessons from each of the separate group discussions into a single presentation of 15 minutes. You may choose how to divide up the task of presenting your findings to the whole group, but please provide the audience with a synthesis, not a series of separate summaries. In addition to these summary lessons, you might want to share a handful of open questions or next steps for history instructors that emerge from your meeting. Your presentation should help us come away with an agenda for further action on history teaching and learning, especially at the introductory level in relation to assignments.

After your presentation, we should have some time for questions and a general discussion among all Charrette attendees.

### **Some questions for recorders to consider during and after the workshop:**

- What are the key teaching issues/challenges that faculty and students are facing in their courses?
- What are common observations about the role of assignments in history learning? What are some characteristics and qualities of good assignments? To what extent are these informed by history as a specific discipline?
- To what extent are desired learning outcomes in intro courses shared across disciplines?
- What work can instructors do to improve their assignments? What kinds of feedback did they ask for? How might a college/university or the AHA help to support work on assignments?