

Sample Annotated Agenda for an Assignment Design Event

Preliminary notes and suggestions:

This agenda assumes a half-day event--which is probably enough since most participants find the experience quite intense--but it could certainly be extended. A nice touch, and enticement to participate, is to begin with breakfast or lunch.

Participants should bring copies of a draft assignment with them. *And it's even better if they can submit those assignments in advance so they can be distributed and read by others in the group before the actual event. As noted in the "invitation to participate" document in this toolkit, assignments (as given to students) should be accompanied by a reflective memo that explains the context in which the assignment is used, and a rubric or criteria for evaluating student work.*

How should groups be organized? *Most faculty appear to be more comfortable sharing their pedagogical work with others who are not in their immediate department. Multi-disciplinary groups have the advantage, as well, of raising questions about more cross-cutting outcomes. On the other hand, some assignments focus on knowledge and abilities that are particular to the field and where at least some knowledge of the field is required in order to respond in a meaningful way. With this in mind, a middle ground is to create groups by families or field: for instance arts and humanities together, social sciences, and so forth. As noted in the next paragraph, another option is to invite faculty to participate in teams.*

Who should participate? *Faculty members, of course, including adjuncts. But think about including others who interact with students and shape the educational experience: librarians, student life professionals, advisors. They may not have assignments to contribute but they can bring important insights. Additionally, think about inviting participants to attend and work together as teams with assignments that are, or could be, connected to one another in ways that create clearer, stronger pathways for students. For instance, a faculty member teaching a lower level course in the major might attend with one who teaches the capstone; their focus would be on linking those assignments in some way.*

See accompanying PP slides, which you are free to adapt.

Welcome and Introductions [10 minutes]

Depending on the size of the group, introductions could be at tables instead of around the full group. Keep in mind that there will be some nervousness about sharing work that is often seen as private; this is a chance to create a welcoming, improvement-oriented tone. See Guidelines for Facilitators (or for conducting unfacilitated charrettes, please see the Guide for Unfacilitated assignment design) elsewhere in this toolkit.

Context and Rationale [10 minutes]

It's important to begin with a clear sense of purpose: why focus on assignments? What are the goals for the day? What do you hope that people will take away from the occasion? See accompanying PowerPoint slides. Emphasize the value of the experience to faculty and to students.

This could also be a time to mention and briefly describe the NILOA Assignment Library, to give participants a sense that they are part of something bigger. There are several slides focused on the NILOA initiative.

Charrette Discussions [timing depends on the size of the groups]

In this segment, you'll work in small groups, with colleagues, to discuss your assignments. The goal here is to share what you're working on with others who will ask good questions, offer suggestions, prompt consequential reflection and also learn from what you're doing. Each group will have a facilitator.

Participants should be sitting in small groups with a facilitator (see Guidelines for Facilitators). NILOA has found that groups of 4-5 (not counting the facilitator) work well to give voice to diverse perspective. But depending on available time, groups can be smaller than this. Before beginning, distribute the assignments, if they have not been sent around in advance, so everyone has a copy of the assignment(s) under discussion. Also distribute the feedback sheet (see sample elsewhere in this toolkit).

The NILOA process is as follows for each participant in the group:

- *Assignment author sets up the discussion, briefly reviewing the focus and purpose of the assignment, and indicating what kind of feedback would be most useful--5 minutes*
- *Q&A, feedback, discussion—15 minutes*
- *Written feedback—5 minutes*
- *Brief break before the next person*

We have found that it's useful to include this set of bullets in the agenda; it is also on the PP slides and on a handout that can be provided to participants to guide them through the entire process.

Reflections [15 minutes]

This can be done within the charrette groups or (better probably) as a group of the whole. What have people learned? What themes have emerged? What was it like to participate in this work? How might others be involved? Are there aspects of the process that would be helpful with other groups on campus?

Adjourn