

## **Definition of Big Question (BQ)**

A big, or essential, question (BQ) is open-ended, taps into the heart of the discipline, provides an opportunity for integration and connection to personal/social/professional issues, and addresses the question of “what can I do with this learning?”

### **Assumptions about Big Questions (BQ)**

- BQ are enduring and should cause students to grapple with the material and have no simple or obvious answer.
- BQ must connect and lead naturally to course content and activities.
- BQ are meant to be investigated, argued, and looked at from different points of view.
- BQ raise other important questions.
- BQ provide an organization or frame for the course and an opportunity for integration and connection to personal, social, or professional issues.
- BQ may be tweaked and restructured as the course progresses.
- BQ should guide the structure of signature assignments (SA), but it is not required to assess a BQ in any particular way. Instructors retain choice about the nature and format of the SA.

### **Examples of Big Questions (BQ) (which is by no means inclusive)**

- How does social justice impact humanity?
- What is the “good life”?
- What is knowledge?
- How do plants contribute to the quality of human life?
- How does the universe really work?
- How does algebra provide a model of or way of making sense of the world?
- How do our biology and social context/experiences influence who we are or how we understand the world?
- How can science help me have stronger/healthier interpersonal relationships?
- How can psychology help me be a better student?
- How can psychology help me better understand people?
- How can I know that what I know about (psychology/sociology/etc) isn’t so?
- How can I distinguish science and pseudoscience/fact from fiction, and why is the distinction important?
- Does art reflect culture or shape it?
- How is disease represented in art?
- Are mathematical ideas inventions or discoveries?
- Why are some innovations successful while others are not?
- How does a [biologist, engineer, historian, poet, sociologist...] think?
- What sort of questions does a [biologist, engineer, historian, poet, sociologist...] ask about the world?
- What is reductionism and what is its value in understanding the physical world (for

chemistry, as an example)?

- What is the impact of quantum mechanics on human knowledge (questions about determinism)?
- Can a society modernize yet preserve its cultural identity?
- How can war be avoided?
- How do logic and language relate?
- How does human biology constrain and support human cognition?
- How should we respond to crime?
- Is pleasure the only ultimate good?
- What constitutes a cultural group?
- What is the relationship between economic growth and demand for environmental quality?
- What should we eat?
- Why has Africa remained so poor for so long?

### **Definition of Signature Assignment (SA)**

A Signature Assignment (SA) requires that students integrate and apply course content to address a significant personal, social, or professional question or issue in some way (e.g., through critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, quantitative literacy, inquiry and analysis, etc.) for a specified audience.

### **Assumptions about Signature Assignments (SA)**

- SAs should be significant, meaningful, and synthesize multiple concepts from the course learning outcomes.
- A SA may be a single assignment that meets the above definition. However, it may also be comprised of multiple assignments (like journaling, smaller homework that culminates in a larger project, lab assignments, etc.) over the term. If there are multiple assignments embedded in the SA, it is encouraged that there be some sort of final and culminating activity that requires students reflect on the activity itself, the process they used to complete the activity, and/or the challenges/obstacles encountered while engaging in the activity.
- SAs should be REQUIRED work in the course (not extra credit or at students' discretion to complete), but faculty retain discretion to determine the SA's weight as a proportion of the overall course grade.
- SAs should be explicit about four elements which will assess the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (GELOs):
  - a. Audience
  - b. Personal, social, or professional question or issue
  - c. Integrating and applying course content (connections to other disciplines or courses)
  - d. Intellectual tools

## **Examples of Signature Assignments (which is by no means inclusive)**

Students may

- Build a website
- Write an essay
- Engage in a community engaged project (including a reflection component)
- Create a video
- Be part of a group poster project
- Create an individual poster project
- Write structured journaling (including a reflection component)
- Create/edit magazine of writing pieces or other media
- Write argument/persuasive paper