

SIGNATURE ASSIGNMENT: INSTRUCTIONS TO FACULTY

BACKGROUND

As part of the General Education (GE) revitalization process, GE courses will have unique features that distinguish them from other courses in the curriculum. Central among these unique features is that course content will address a Big Question (BQ) so that students can appreciate the broader implications and meaning of the course. These implications and meaning may involve social, personal, and/or professional issues as the individual faculty sees fit.

The Signature Assignment (SA) is designed to assess this unique feature of GE courses and, by doing so, the assessment will tap program-level student learning outcomes for GE. The program learning outcomes include integration and application (GELO 4) of content knowledge (GELO 1)¹ to address a personal/social/professional question or issue (GELO 3) through the exercise of intellectual tools (GELO 2). Given the goals of a Signature Assignment, we propose the following definition:

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.

Each faculty member teaching a GE course is expected to assign a SA, although the SA can be defined, weighted, and assessed at the faculty member's discretion for course grades. SAs will be collected and assessed by the Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Assessment, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and GEIAC for the GE program outcomes for purposes of accreditation and the integrity of the GE program. The nature and implications of this assessment process are discussed in the *Outline of Gen Ed Assessment* document (forthcoming). This document will inform you about the requirements of a SA to ensure consistent implementation and assessment across GE courses. While these instructions are guidelines, we think it is helpful to make clear to students the skills we expect them to exercise in completing the SA and for which they will be assessed.

ASSIGNING SAs

Although faculty members have a great deal of discretion in what the SAs will look like in their GE courses, the following guidelines are intended to clarify to students the features and goals of SAs and to make performing the assessment meaningful. We suggest that faculty use the following four key elements in instructing students about the requirements of a SA.

¹ Assessment of content knowledge is the responsibility of faculty and departments, in compliance with WSU Core and Breadth Area learning outcomes and USHE R470.

1. **AUDIENCE:** To assess the effectiveness of the SA, faculty must make explicit for students an audience to whom the SA should be addressed. The choice of audience is at faculty discretion. The audience may be students themselves in the case of a self-reflection, it may be a future employer in the case of a business plan, or it may be the professor in the case of writing for an “expert in the field.” However, other audiences are possible too including members of students’ family, the community, children or adolescents, or even virtual or future audiences. Whatever audience faculty choose, the choice should be explicit in the assignment description because it requires students to imagine and/or adopt a perspective in the SA. Clarity in specifying the audience will aid assessment of students’ communication skills as part of GELO 2 (Intellectual Tools).
2. **PERSONAL/SOCIAL/PROFESSIONAL QUESTION OR ISSUE:** Faculty should express the significant personal/social/professional question or issue for students to address in the SA. Faculty can specifically define the nature of the question or issue (address issue X) or provide students the opportunity to define the nature of the question or issue for themselves (address the meaning or significance). For example, does the question or issue bear on a social concern (such as sustainability, social justice, or global learning), a personal concern (such as a self-reflection or evaluation of prior beliefs or knowledge), and/or a professional concern (such as being on the job)? Ideally, the question or issue will be tied in some way to the BQ, but there is no obligation that it must be. Clarity in the question or issue of the SA will aid assessment of GELO 3 (Responsibility to Self and Others).
3. **INTEGRATING AND APPLYING COURSE CONTENT:** Faculty should specify which course content students need to integrate and apply in the SA. The specification can be explicit and directive about the content (specified concepts), explicit but less directive (any of the following contents), implicit and directive (key content from chapters 5 and 6), or implicit and not directive (content from any part of the course). Course content will not be assessed for purposes of Gen Ed review (see forthcoming *Outline of Gen Ed Assessment* document), but evidence of students’ ability to integrate and apply the content will be assessed for GE learning outcomes. A clear description of which content is to be integrated and applied in the SA will aid assessment of GELO 4 (Connected and Applied Learning).
4. **INTELLECTUAL TOOLS:** We suggest that faculty broadly outline *how* students are to bring course content to bear on the question or issue. For example, faculty may ask students to integrate and apply course content to a) solve a problem, b) critique or analyze a claim, c) find an alternative to particular perspectives/viewpoints, c) evaluate a situation/process, d) interpret patterns of evidence, or e) reflect on their own learning. This is not an exhaustive list of the entire set of options faculty may specify. Clear specification of the kind of intellectual tools students are asked to exercise in the SA will aid assessment of GELO 2 (Intellectual Tools).