

Signature Assignment Quick Reference Guide

A 'signature assignment' is an assignment, task, activity, project or exam purposefully created or modified to collect evidence for a specific learning outcomes or learning outcomes. In the case of core curriculum, signature assignments will be designed to facilitate the assessment of learning outcomes derived from the [core objectives](#) mandated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Signature assignments work well when they are course-embedded. Ideally, other coursework builds toward the signature assignment, meaning that the signature assignment should measure the culmination of what the student learned in the course for a particular outcome ([California Lutheran University n.d.](#)).

Signature assignments are designed collaboratively by faculty. They can be generic in task, problem, case or project to allow for contextualization in different disciplines or course contexts. The 'signature' of the assignment is the defining characteristics that reveal thinking or practices ([Driscoll 2011](#)). For example, Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) requires the use of signature assignments to assess their general education outcomes, but they wanted to allow faculty autonomy in formulating the signature assignments, so they established a few general requirements for the assignments, the signature assignment must: 1) address at least two learning outcomes, 2) include student reflection, and 3) demonstrate a real-world, not theoretical, application of disciplinary knowledge. One of the mathematics faculty at SLCC operationalized the signature assignment directives by asking students to act as potential car buyers and calculate how different interest rates affect the amount of money spent. Further, the assignment asks students to reflect on how this activity can be applied in other classes or real-world scenarios. So, for this example signature assignment, students are asked to demonstrate quantitative reasoning as well as communication skills ([AAC&U News n.d.](#)).

The example from SLCC reflects institution-wide signature assignment directives, but at UTA, faculty will determine the requirements of their respective signature assignments. Requirements such as those used at SLCC could be adopted by faculty developing signature assignments, but additional requirements will need to be considered, specifically the nature of the assignment (e.g. case study, reflective essay). An [issue inquiry signature assignment](#) developed by a first-year program faculty member at UT Austin provides an example of more specific signature assignment requirements. The assignment requires the student to address seven questions:

- What sorts of views are represented on the various sides of the issue (there are usually more than two sides to these issues)?
- Who holds these different views?
- What organizations seem interested in it, and who makes up their membership? Who gives them money?
- What kinds of evidence are they using to support their claims?
- How do you see the issue related to democracy?
- Whose voices are being heard, and whose are not?
- How does this affect the most vulnerable people in society? Who benefits?

Further, the issue inquiry paper must be limited to seven pages and must include the use of five sources. The topic area issue could be at the discretion of the faculty. This assignment could be used by various disciplines such as English, History, Political Science, Sociology, Communications or the sciences. The example assignment could also be used to assess one or more of four of the core objectives, including written communication, critical thinking, personal responsibility, or social responsibility.

Signature assignments are useful when assessing the core curriculum because they can provide comparable assessment data across multiple courses and disciplines taught by various faculty using varied pedagogy.

Suggested Design Process for Signature Assignments

1. Faculty identify the required [Core Objectives](#) for the appropriate [Foundational Component Area](#).
2. Faculty discuss and agree upon what the course requires students to demonstrate and how that maps/links to the required Core Objectives.
3. Faculty review current embedded course work that could be used as a signature assignment.
4. Faculty determine if a new assignment will need to be developed for use as a signature assignment.

Note: It may be helpful to use the [AAC&U Value Rubrics](#) to guide discussion and examination of potential signature assignments. These instruments can help direct focus to what the signature assignment is intended to elicit from the student.

5. Faculty agree upon the nature and major components and guidelines for the signature assignment, such as the type of the assignment and what core objectives will be addressed by the assignment, prior to submission of the course for the core curriculum course selection process [deadline](#). Details of the assignment can be finalized once the communal rubrics are developed and agreed upon in the Fall 2013.

Signature Assignment Guidelines

- Salt Lake Community College *Implementing Critical Thinking with Signature Assignments Guide* provides a comprehensive look at operationalizing critical thinking and the implementation of signature assignments:
<http://www.slcc.edu/assessment/docs/Critical%20Thinking%20Signature%20Assignments%20Guidebook%20Rev%201-3.pdf>
- Salt Lake Community College Guidelines for creating critical thinking signature assignments:
http://cms.slcc.edu/assessment/docs/CT_Introduction_Pages_and_Instructions/Step%202%20-%20Identify%20or%20Create%20a%20Signature%20Assignment.pdf
- California State University Northridge Ed.D. program signature assignment guidelines:
https://admin.sp.uta.edu/business/irp/UEP/Rubric_SignatureAssignment.doc
- Tarleton State University on-campus workshop on signature assignments handout presented by Mary Allen: <https://admin.sp.uta.edu/business/irp/UEP/SigAssignmentHandout-Cascade.rtf>
- Salt Lake Community College signature assignment planning template:
<https://admin.sp.uta.edu/business/irp/UEP/Forms%20and%20Templates%202%20-%20Signature%20Assignment%20Planning%20Template.docx>

Signature Assignment Examples

- UT Austin sample assignments and rubrics: <https://www.utexas.edu/ugs/sig/plan/samples>
- Physics reflection essay assignment highlighting the learning process including challenges, assumptions, and conclusions:
<http://stevengregerson.weebly.com/uploads/7/5/0/2/7502436/phys-signature-reflection-essay-sgregerson.pdf>
- Research webliography assignment to demonstrate outcomes of a bilingual teacher candidate seminar course:
<http://edweb.sdsu.edu/NCATE/CCTC%20Reports/Bilingual%20Authorization/PLC960ESA.pdf>
- Case study project to demonstrate outcomes for an education course focused on individuals with exceptional needs: <https://sites.google.com/site/5016lmu2013/signature-assignment>
- Educational finance course syllabus including course and university learning outcomes and signature assignment description : <http://nau.edu/COE/Ed-Leadership/Forms/EDL-635-Spring-2013/>
- List of early childhood education courses, their signature assignments, and evaluation rubrics:
<http://www.prescott.edu/intranet/assets/teacher-preparation/limited-residency-undergraduate-teacher-preparation/early-childhood-education/lru-early-childhood-education-signature-assignments.pdf>
- Maricopa County Community College District cultural diversity in education signature assignment guidelines: <https://admin.sp.uta.edu/business/irp/UEP/230%20Project%201.doc>
- Northern Arizona University Art Education syllabus including signature assignment guidelines and evaluation rubric: https://admin.sp.uta.edu/business/irp/UEP/ARE_308_Signature_Assignment.doc
- California State University Sacramento Psychology of Instruction course signature assignment guidelines and a checklist for students:
<https://admin.sp.uta.edu/business/irp/UEP/signature%20assignment%20checklist.doc>

Other Resources:

- AAC& U Value Rubrics:
http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/index_p.cfm?CFID=4398984&CFTOKEN=40954694
- AAC&U Article *Signature Assignments Become a Signature Practice at Salt Lake Community College*:
http://www.aacu.org/aacu_news/aacunews11/april11/feature.cfm
- California Lutheran University signature assignments website including overview, CLU student learning outcomes and mission statement, program learning outcomes, writing SLOs, SLOs in course syllabi, curriculum maps, and student learning outcomes evidence sections:
http://www.callutheran.edu/assessment/student_learning_outcomes/SignatureAssignments.php
- Rutgers website with aggregate signature assignment assessment results:
<http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/course-and-signature-assignment-assessments>
- American Association of Community Colleges guide to integrating civic responsibility into curriculum:
http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/horizons/Documents/cr_guide_2nd.pdf