Creating a Signature Assignment for the Program

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After participating in this session, you will be able to...

• **Define** a signature assignment

• **Determine** if a signature assignment is needed

• **Conceptualize** a signature assignment for the program
What is a Signature Assignment?
**Define: What is a Signature Assignment?**

According to the **American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)**, *signature assignments*...

Require students to demonstrate and apply their proficiency in one or more key learning outcomes.

When programs integrate them across the educational pathway, *signature assignments*...

Help students demonstrate their growth, make connections across the curriculum and co-curriculum, and apply their knowledge to real world problems.

Source: AAC&U | [Integrating signature assignments into the curriculum and inspiring design](#)
# Case Study: California Lutheran University’s Signature Assignments

## Ed.D. in Educational Leadership (K-12) Program Outcomes Signature Assignments Assessment Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM OUTCOMES</th>
<th>SIGNATURE ASSIGNMENTS K=KNOWLEDGE, S=SKILLS, D=DISPOSITIONS</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT DATA BY SEMESTER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Program graduates will be leaders who will contribute to student success by:</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLD 603</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Educational Leadership Paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLD 607</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Dilemmas Paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLD 625</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Principles Based Educational Leadership Presentation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leading organizational change in a diverse society.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLD 603</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Educational Leadership Paper</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLD 605</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of Practice Paper</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLD 624</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Initiative Case Study</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLD 625</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
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<td>3. Establishing a caring &amp; collaborative learning community.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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<td>EDLD 605</td>
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<td>Leadership Practices Inventory</td>
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<td>4. Supporting the principles of teaching &amp; learning.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Grades (1 – 4 point scale, 1=low, 4=high)                                           
** Rubric(1 – 5 point scale, 1=low, 4=high)                                           
N/O Not offered this semester

Source: [Signature Assignments | Institutional Research at Cal Lutheran](#)
Define: What is a Signature Assignment?

Signature assignments, when implemented across the curriculum, often...

- involve synthesizing, analyzing, and applying cumulative knowledge and skills through problem- or inquiry-based assignments or projects
- follow a theme across curricular and co-curricular experiences tied to the institutional mission or features of the surrounding community, allowing students to apply their growing knowledge and abilities to meaningful questions over time
- include specific components, such as a “real-world” application, reflective writing, or collaborative work

Source: AAC&U | Integrating signature assignments into the curriculum and inspiring design.
Define: What is a Signature Assignment?

Signature assignments are not...

• necessarily the assignments with the most weight or highest point value in a course
• disconnected learning outcomes
• easily removed from the course
• low-stakes assignments (although low-stakes work can certainly contribute to signature work)

Source: University of Arizona | Introduction to Signature Assignment: Design and Implementation
For us, a signature assignment is a substantial project within a course that illustrates something quintessential about course content, embeds at least one general education learning outcome, asks students to synthesize and apply learning, gives students agency and choice in the application of their learning, and requires a significant and intentional reflective component to help students identify and articulate relationships between course material, the curriculum, their community, and their sense of self.

Dr. Stephanie Roach and Dr. Jennifer Alvey
University of Michigan-Flint

Source: Fostering Integrative Learning and Reflection through "Signature Assignments" | AAC&U (aacu.org)
Each component of our definition speaks to connectivity: connecting concepts within courses; courses to learning outcomes; outcomes to practical application of learning; application to student agency; and agency to learning processes that aid meaning-making and learning transfer. The assignments are a signature feature of the course, and in completing the assignment, students put their signature stamp on the work by showcasing their unique selves, their learning experiences, and the issues that matter to them.

Dr. Stephanie Roach and Dr. Jennifer Alvey
University of Michigan-Flint

Source: Fostering Integrative Learning and Reflection through “Signature Assignments” | AAC&U (aacu.org)
Reflect, write, share.

What assignments that you and/or program faculty teach already resemble signature assignments? What makes them seem like “signature assignments”?

Take 5-10 minutes to write quietly.
Define: What is a Signature Assignment?

QUESTION. What assignments that you and/or program faculty teach already resemble signature assignments? What makes them seem like “signature assignments”?

IDEAS.
• Marketing plan—common experience; practical experience; seminal/keystone project of the major
• Processing experience abroad; research deep dive on cultural issue after study abroad; could submit video, deck, etc.
When Do You Need a Signature Assignment?
**Determine:** When Do You Need a Signature Assignment?

**Need 1:** You need to ensure a clear linkage between learning outcomes and assessment measures.

>>> A signature assignment is intentionally designed with PLOs in mind.
Someone who looks at the assignment, project, or exam that was used to evaluate the student on the program learning outcome should understand why it was chosen and feel pretty confident that the data collected is evidence that the student accomplished the program learning outcome. **Our programs need good data so they can make good decisions that support continuous improvement.** The assignment, project, or exam should not seem random [...] Similar to how faculty develop methods for evaluating students on course learning outcomes, assessments for program learning outcomes should be intentionally designed and clearly linked.
Determine: When Do You Need a Signature Assignment?

Need 2: You need to ensure consistency when assessing across multiple course sections, particularly those taught by different instructors.

>>> A common signature assignment can provide a consistent piece of evidence across sections and time.
Program Assessment & Continuous Improvement

Continuous Improvement Framework

- PLAN: What data do you need, and how will you get it?
- DO: Collect data
- CHECK: Analyze the results
- ACT: Use data to inform your decisions

Signature Assignments
Determine: When Do You Need a Signature Assignment?

Need 3: Your program sees benefit in a theme that connects student learning experiences across the curriculum.

Signature assignments designed with shared features in mind can help students make meaningful connections between courses.
The University of Arizona identifies connections as the key criteria for designing assignments (signature and otherwise) that are meaningful to students.

- Connections to community
- Connections to self
- Connections to career and disciplinary interests
- And more...

Source: University of Arizona | Introduction to Signature Assignment: Design and Implementation
How Do You Create a Signature Assignment?
Exercise: What might Constitute a Signature Assignment for your program at U of I?

1. **Identify** program-specific criteria for signature assignments. What would you like to see? We can draw from our previous exercise and from the experiences of other institutions that have done this.

2. **Consider** rollout. Do you want to pilot the assignment in a course that really needs help with data collection? Do you have a course that is taught by several different instructors and so you see a lot of inconsistency in terms of artifacts submitted for review?

   → **Recall:** A signature assignment can be a huge help for data collection. It can also be excellent for pedagogical improvement because of the kind of intentional assignment design it encourages.

3. **Define** success. How will you know if a signature assignment project on campus was successful? What would it do for Program leadership? For faculty? For students?