

AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Dear all,

I hope you are well as the holiday breaks begin. Thank you for agreeing to help staff the AHA's Assignment Charrette for this year's Undergraduate Teaching Workshop in Atlanta.

A few things. First, please read Pat Hutchings, Natasha A. Jankowski, & Peter T. Ewell, "Catalyzing Assignment Design Activity on Your Campus: Lessons from NILOA's [Assignment Library Initiative](#)". You are all already familiar with the AHA's Tuning project; this **article** will fill you in on another important context for our assignment charrette, which we have adapted for historians from a process that the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) has been implementing with interdisciplinary groups of faculty around the country. This reading will give you a sense of other work that is being done in the area of faculty work on assignments, and spells out some of the goals that we can hope to achieve with our workshop participants in a few weeks.

Second, I will be writing again in the next day to share the **full set of assignment materials** from all of the workshop participants. At that time, I will also let you know which pairs of facilitator and recorder will be working with which groups of 4-5 faculty presenters. Please plan to read the assignments and other documents from your group of presenters very carefully and take notes. In addition, I encourage you to read through as many of the other assignments as you can, with the understanding that you will not go into as much depth with them.

Third, please read the attached set of **suggested questions** for facilitators to ask during an assignment charrette. Note that because this document was produced specifically for the NILOA charrettes based on the [Degree Qualifications Profile](#), the introductory remarks are not perfectly aligned with our own, specific goals for a charrette of assignments used in introductory history courses. Nevertheless, I think that this is a very useful list. I will adapt a version of it to hand out to facilitators and staff at the workshop (and email to you before that).

Finally, we would like to schedule a **conference call** to help orient you all to your tasks. I will be sending out a **Doodle scheduling poll** for this by tomorrow; please reply as soon as possible. I expect that we might need to hold two such calls, because people's holiday schedules will be tricky. If we succeed in getting you all on a call, I might still have an **optional in-person meeting in Atlanta** on Thursday, January 7 for any last-minute questions or issues, but you don't need to plan your meeting schedule around it. I just want you all to feel confident that you know what you are supposed to do, and that we are all on the same page.

I'll be in touch again very soon. In the meantime, please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks again for your help,
Julia

Julia Brookins
Special Projects Coordinator American Historical Association

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Suggestions for Assignments Charrette Staff: Facilitators and Recorders

Our goals for this workshop are to practice collaborative methods for refining great assignments, and to generate specific ideas for further faculty work on history teaching, especially in relation to student learning through assignments at the introductory collegiate level.

The presenters have all written 1-page memos about their assignments and will have five minutes to concisely summarize and provide additional context to frame discussion of their work with colleagues. By the end of the 5-minute introductory statement, each Charrette member should have a clear understanding of the following:

1. Course location within the curriculum
2. Student demographics (level, major/non-major), etc.
3. Student motivation for taking the course
4. Ways assignment fits into course content
5. Proficiencies being assessed
6. Experience with assignment
7. Particular challenges faced by students
8. Questions for colleagues

Suggestions for facilitators:

After the oral introduction, make sure the presenter has addressed the 8 points above in at least cursory form. Be prepared with a few questions or probes to use should conversation be slow to start. Be willing and ready to restate or summarize major points to help the presenter stay relaxed and keep the conversation in constructive territory. Keep the conversation moving when it drifts or seems overly redundant.

You and every other presenter should fill out a feedback form at the end of each presentation. The recorder/secretary may fill one out, but does not need to—it might be more productive to spend this time going over notes. Make sure that each presenter collects all of the feedback forms at the end of his or her allotted time.

Suggestions for facilitator questions to have ready if needed:

- What are specific qualities and characteristics that highlight the strengths or weaknesses of this assignment?
- What does this assignment look like from the student perspective?
- Do students have a clear understanding of what is expected and how they will be graded?
- How appropriate is this assignment based on the level of students in the class?

- How is this assignment part of a growth process for students?
- What are students expected to learn by doing the task? (Not just: What are they demonstrating by completing the assignment?)
- This assignment is worth X% of the grade. What else do students do in the course that will increase the likelihood that they will be successful?
- What opportunities do students have for practice, feedback, and refinement?
- Is this a ‘high stakes’ assignment? Are there examples for partial credit? Does the student’s experience in the discipline make a difference?
- What would a response from a more advanced student completing this assignment look like?
- If the class has students at various levels and interests (beginning, mid-level and seniors/majors/non-majors) are all held to the same standard?
- What would a capstone paper look like, and how are these different from responses to a research paper or primary-source analysis in an introductory class?
- Is the language clear? Is the format easy to understand? Are there components that are either missing or extraneous, given what the instructor wants students to do?

Suggestions for recorders:

Keep time for the group. Oral intro by presenter - 5 minutes; Discussion -15 minutes; writing feedback – 5 minutes. (Jane Doe, John Doe, and Joe Doe only have 4 presenters, so you can take extra 3-4 minutes in discussion and 1 minute on the written feedback in those groups.)

Please take written notes on the discussion (do not make an audio or video recording). Pay attention not only to the concerns that arise in multiple discussions, but also to the broader themes and ideas that seem to be emerging across the group. Some keywords that I thought I saw while reading the assignments included: **imagination, narrative, past/present, meta-cognition, empathy, scaffolding analytical writing, identifying significant questions and generating research strategies, conflicting sources, and civic contexts for history education.**

The facilitator and every other presenter should fill out a feedback form at the end of each section. As the recorder, you may but do not need to fill out a feedback form—it might be more productive to spend this time adding to/going over your notes.

After the small group discussions, you will have 25 minutes to confer with other recorders and distill the lessons from each of the separate group discussions into a single presentation of 15 minutes. You may choose how to divide up the task of presenting your findings to the whole group, but please provide the audience with a synthesis, not a series of separate summaries. In addition to these summary lessons, you might want to share a handful of open questions or next steps for history instructors that emerge from your meeting. Your presentation should help us come away with an agenda for further action on history teaching and learning, especially at the introductory level in relation to assignments.

After your presentation, we should have some time for questions and a general discussion among all charrette attendees.

Some questions for recorders to consider during and after the workshop:

- What are the key teaching issues/challenges that faculty and students are facing in their courses?
- What are common observations about the role of assignments in history learning? What are some characteristics and qualities of good assignments? To what extent are these informed by history as a specific discipline?
- To what extent are desired learning outcomes in intro courses shared across disciplines?
- What work can instructors do to improve their assignments? What kinds of feedback did they ask for? How might a college/university or the AHA help to support work on assignments?

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2016 Assignments Charrette: Feedback Form

Assignment _____

Comments From (name) _____

1. What outcomes do you think students will be able to demonstrate with this assignment?

2. What are the main strengths of this assignment for assessing the identified outcomes?

3. Thinking about the assignment from the point of view of students, what questions or suggestions do you have?

4. Other suggestions and possibilities - especially in response to the author's questions about improving the assignment?

5. Recommendation for specific change(s) to the assignment:

6. What questions do you still have about the assignment?