

Nifty Assignments

Nifty Assignment Ideas for INTD 105

A "nifty assignment" is a particularly creative or elegant way of engaging students with course material. Here are brief descriptions of some from INTD 105. Feel free to adapt these ideas for your own use (in INTD 105 or elsewhere), and to contact the original presenters for more information. If you have nifty assignments of your own that you'd like to share here, please let me (Doug Baldwin, baldwin@geneseo.edu) know.

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Student Magazine

(As described by Adrienne Maher at the August 2019 instructors' workshop.)

The goal of this exercise is to engage students in composition by keeping it new and relevant to them, in particular by recognizing the variety of literacies (expressed, e.g., via different genres, different Englishes, different cultures, etc.) and motivations (e.g., social justice, becoming global citizens, etc.) that students bring to college. The project extended over the full semester (in future offerings it might be concentrated in the second half), with roughly the first half devoted to readings (with a social justice theme for this section), and small group discussions and presentations of the reading, and the second half devoted to producing a digital magazine. The original intent was that this would be a literary magazine based on the readings, although the students were also interested in developing other content related to their overall experience as young adults. Actual production was done by small groups of students, some groups writing content, others editing, etc. Groups switched roles at least once so that students experienced more than one role. The final product was saved as a large PDF file and then posted to a magazine-hosting web site (anyflip.com in this particular case). Two examples of finished magazines are [here](#) and [here](#).

Resisting Phone Culture

(As described by Steve Derné at the August 2019 instructors' workshop.)

"Phone culture," or perhaps online culture more generally, is pervasive and problematic today: it encourages people's attention to be elsewhere than their physical presence, facilitates beliefs developing in "echo chambers," develops a binary "yes-no" "swipe-left-swipe-right" view of decision-making, expects high-speed low-thought decisions, always demands attention, and is a deeply materialistic culture. In contrast to this culture, there is much to value in reflection, self-discovery, attention to the here-and-now, and willingness to devote time to those things. The structure and philosophy of INTD 105 makes it an excellent opportunity to develop such attitudes. In particular:

- Having small classes, and group work within the small classes, gets students to attend to the here-and-now
- Learning academic argument helps students learn to listen to and truly hear views other than their own
- Developing finished work through multiple assignments and revisions develops resilience and willingness to improve over time
- Assignments can explicitly ask students to think beyond simple snap judgements; in particular asking them to comment on academic theories in light of their own experiences is a good way to make them think in more nuanced terms than simply "right" versus "wrong."

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