

## ENHANCING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH TRANSPARENT ASSIGNMENT DESIGN

Direct communication among educators and students about the methods of teaching and learning can have a powerful impact on student success. As part of a multi-institution collaboration with AAC&U, St. Edward's University improved student learning metrics by connecting intentional assignment design to pedagogical innovation.

**Assignment transparency is a high-impact intervention to improve student success.**

Transparent assignment design supports student learning by making expectations explicit. This benefits all students, especially those with less academic preparation.

The [Transparency in Learning and Teaching \(TILT\)](#) framework promotes intentionality in articulating the skills an assignment develops. The core principles of TILT focus on ensuring clarity of the assignment's purpose, the required tasks, and how performance on the task will be evaluated.

**Instructor-led workshops promote instructor autonomy and foster open collaboration while providing structured support.**

Through its Center for Teaching Excellence, St. Edward's University developed a collaborative, instructor-centered approach to the assignment redesign process, including

- instructor workshops (in-person and remote) with 33 faculty participants across multiple cohorts;
- interdisciplinary instructor pairings to promote collaborative partnerships during the assignment redesign process;
- commitment to applying TILT principles and aligning assignments with assessable dimensions of AAC&U's [Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric](#); and
- structured workshop time for iterative redesign of assignments.

This collaborative approach leveraged the expertise of instructors from different disciplines and course levels, from first-year seminars to senior-level courses.

**The assignment design process resulted in improvements in assignment clarity and student performance.**

The assessment redesign process at St. Edward's University resulted in

- an increase in higher-order Bloom's taxonomy verbs within the assignment prompts, which help describe and classify observable knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, and abilities and explicitly state what students must do to demonstrate learning;
- more explicit alignment with assessable dimensions of the Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric; and
- improved structural clarity within the assignment prompts (e.g., use of bullet points, sub-headings, bolded text).

Students demonstrated higher-level critical thinking skills when assignment prompts were more intentionally aligned with the rubric dimensions than when assignments were not intentionally aligned. As a result of assignment alignment, 34–57% of students demonstrated scores of 3 or 4 on each dimension of critical thinking, compared to 21–35% without alignment.

**Instructors valued the process and time to reflect on intentional assignment design.**

Instructors shared that the redesign process itself was valuable for their teaching practice. The workshops facilitated a different way of thinking about assignment design, and instructors felt encouraged to

- examine their assignments through the eyes of their students;
- think more intentionally about assignments' role in courses and curricula; and
- identify specific strategies to improve alignment between assignments, course objectives, and assessment goals.

College and university leaders can impact student success and demonstrate progress toward essential learning outcomes by encouraging faculty across disciplines and course levels to engage in an intentional assignment design process.