



Creating Experiential and Interactive Assignments for Students Enrolled in First Year Experience

Session Abstract:

Important goals of First Year Experience courses are to develop academic skills, encourage self-exploration and personal growth, and foster a strong connection with the campus community. Students often struggle with transition in many of these areas. In this roundtable discussion, the facilitators will discuss two interactive assignments used to evaluate student academic achievement and personal growth. Participants will take back to their classrooms the tools necessary to implement one or both of these assignments.

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STUDENT REFLECTIONS

To alleviate concerns students have in transitioning from high to college we assign them two different experiential projects: a brochure due at midterm and a final photo journal. Student

comments before, during, and after completing these projects help track their growth as they complete their first semester of college. Some sample student responses appear below.

Journal 1 Questions and Responses (distributed and completed during the first week of class)

Why did you take this course?

- “I had problems in school all my life”
- “I hope this course would make me a better student and help me study”
- “to meet other students and make friends”
- “find out about the campus and the staff working here”
- “this course will help me make college life everything it can be for me”
- “I wanted to gain new habits, and manage my time properly”

List four purposes for going to college.

- “getting a degree in a specialized field of study”
- “make life-long friends”
- “learn how to survive on your own”
- “to be able to contribute to society” and “to help my family”
- “discover who you are” and “to become what I love doing”
- “to not screw up in my life”



List four differences between high school and college.

- “you must take this seriously, because this is your future”
- “you must know what is going on, you cannot skip assignments because it is drawn out”
- “in college you are on your own, and no one reminds you”
- “you have a roommate at college”
- “no parents” and “more freedom”
- “you must manage your time consistently”
- “you have a scary budget to manage in college”

List some of your fears and concerns about college.

- “failing”
- “meeting new people” and “not making trustworthy friends”
- “managing my time”
- “not understanding what is going on in my courses”
- “getting homesick, “disappointing my family”
- “not being able to handle college financially”
- “losing myself”



Mid-term Student Reflections (after completion of the brochure project)

What has been the most beneficial part of this course?

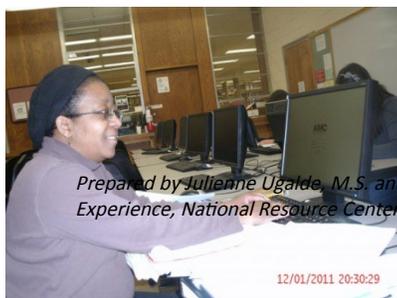
- “knowing my advisor”
- “learning ways to keep on top of my work”
- “discovering myself”
- “time management”, “social skills”, and “study skills”
- “I love the special guests, I learn a lot about the college this way”
- “the assignment for the freshmen brochure”
- “the FYE instructors are very helpful and with us 100% of the way”
- “making friends”
- “learning styles”, “emotional health”, and “learning how to deal with stress”

What do you like best about this course?

- “interactions with other students from the other section, professors interactions, and the guest speakers”
- “the professor doesn’t dominate the class structure”
- “I can make a new friend”
- “it covers everything a freshmen needs to be successful”
- “it is sensitive to our learning, and makes accommodations to what we really want to learn”
- “I loved joining groups and talking to the other FYE students”
- “I love the small group work and the methods of presentation for the topics”

What were your goals? Were they met?

- “I feel comfortable with the campus now”
- “I learned some new study skills, which is helping me to be successful”
- “yes, this course has helped me get organized, stay on top of things, and helped me concentrate and not get stressed out”
- “it helped me discover new learning and study strategies”
- “to get some basic knowledge of the AMC campus and the community”
- “to become a better student”
- “I was not ready for college and this has helped me get ready”



Reflections Following the Final Photo-Journal Project

What concepts of college life did you learn about by doing this project?

- “I didn’t like working in groups before I started this project. Groups are sometimes difficult to work in ... we had a hard time but we managed to work together.”
- “how to respect my fellow students and how important team work is”
- “it was just fun to go through everything I have done”
- “time management, studying, laundry!”
- “procrastination is never a good thing and you should always do your work on time”

What challenges of college life were represented in the photo journal?

- “dorm life, education, time management, sports and clubs, and social life”
- “challenges depicted included roommates, time, and money”
- “getting involved in clubs and sports and getting along with your roommate. Doing these things takes a conscious, committed effort.”
- “getting enough sleep, paying attention in class, keeping up with all your school work”

How have your relationships changed among friends doing this photo journal?

- “I usually work in groups with my friends that I have already made and doing this photo journal has allowed me to meet new friends and talk to new people.”
- “I made many new, cool friends”
- “became closer and more open to others”
- “I have met people that I would not talk to otherwise”

What new things did you learn about yourself and working in a group?

- “I get things done. I work well in groups and am often a leader.”
- “I can’t have free time. The more free time I have the less work I get done. Also working in groups helped out because I can see the others’ point of view.”
- “I can work good in a group. I can take some good looking pictures!”
- “that when I put my mind to it I can be very successful”
- “sharing opinions is the best way to communicate”



How did the completion of this project help you with decision-making skills, critical thinking, and the concept of becoming a life-long learner?

- “I have started doing work sooner instead of procrastinating and learned time-management”
- “it has taught me how to use a computer more, get along with more people, work better in groups, and I have learned more about myself”
- “it has opened my eyes to how I need to be managing my time”
- “it has helped my critical thinking skills because I had to analyze a situation and find a solution”

- “it has taught me that you need to learn your entire life and keep an active mind”

First Year Experience AMC 100

Mid-term Project

First Year Experience Brochure

What are some of the things you think are important to know for incoming freshmen starting college in general and specifically to Anna Maria?

You and your partner will design a brochure to assist in the transition from high school to college. Your brochure will consist of your learning experiences in your first semester and ways to avoid mistakes in your second semester.

The function of a brochure is to create interest to the reader. The point is to hook your audience into reading the brochure. Knowing your audience is important when designing a brochure!

This FYE brochure is to help future AMC freshmen make an easier transition to college.

Please add your personal experiences and perhaps a quote from another student. Make the brochure as personalized as possible!

Here are some topics you may choose for your brochure, or you can choose any topic that may be relevant to you. Please choose a minimum of three topics.

Topics:

Time Management

Roommates

Diversity

Laundry in Residence Halls

Money Management

Home Sickness

Your Responsibilities (Academic and Personally)

Making Friends

Clubs and Sports

Having an Agenda

Choosing Your Classes

Understanding the Academic Requirements of Your Program of Study

**Grading Rubric for Mid-term project:
First Year Experience brochure**

Content and Requirements:	<i>Points Earned</i>	Additional Comments:
Does the student have all the required elements?		
Content: Student has chosen 3 content areas. Brochure should have appropriate information and not be overcrowded.	2	
Pair work: Student has worked closely with another student to complete brochure.	2	
Appearance: The brochure is visually appealing, has appropriate content, and contains text and graphics. Clip art can be in black and white, color brochures are not necessary. It can be humorous, and the brochure will be used for incoming freshmen at orientation dates.	2	
Format: The brochure is 2-sided, tri-fold document and has appropriate font and capitalization when necessary. Brochure uses appropriate vocabulary.	2	
Mechanics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The paper adheres to the rules of standard grammar, and punctuation. 2. Spelling is correct. 3. The tone is appropriate to the First Year Experience content. 4. Students must place their names on the brochure 	2	
Total 10 Points Possible	Points Earned	Additional Comments

First Year Experience
AMC 100
Digital Photo Journal Final Presentation

The final project in this course will be a digital photo journal representing your passage through your first semester here at Anna Maria College. The presentation will be worked on over the semester and will be an in class and out of class assignment. This project will be designed to combine both sections of the First Year Experience. There will be an oral presentation and a written component. Presenting your digital photos to the FYE class in “story” format will be the oral section. This part will take place on the two last scheduled class meeting times. One digital photo journal will be put together from both sections of the First Year Experience. Therefore, group collaboration and cross section collaboration will be necessary. The written section will be a typed reflective essay completed outside of class and shared with other FYE students during the scheduled final exam time.

This digital photo journal is a systematic way of observing and recording your experiences in a chronological order during your first semester here at AMC. The digital photo journal will be of professional quality and suitable to present to Anna Maria College faculty, staff and administration. It will be used at Anna Maria College SOAR dates and orientation.

The purpose of this digital photo journal is to record each stage of your transition to college, work collaboratively as a group, and share your findings with your classmates. This digital photo story journal will be helpful to the next group of incoming freshmen. The digital photo journal will be a reflective process assessing your “ups and downs” of your first semester of college. You will address these questions as you collect your digital photos and place them on the specific web page that we have designed for you.

These questions will also be a part of your typed reflective essay that will be presented during final exam time.

- 1) What was your biggest fear coming to college?
- 2) What was the easiest? What was the hardest?
- 3) How did your family and/or significant other cope with your transition and new schedule?
- 4) Tell us how you felt about the academic schedule, projects, and assignments? Were you able to manage your time wisely?
- 5) How did your roommate work out?
- 6) What clubs or sports did you join?
- 7) How is your first semester experience connected to the goals and mission of AMC?

- 8) Describe your personal and academic growth.
- 9) What would you do differently?
- 10) Give some helpful tips for our next group of incoming freshmen based on your experiences or perhaps lack of experiences.

Grading Rubric for Digital Photo Journal:

Content and Requirements	<i>Points Earned</i>	Additional Comments:
Does the student have all the required elements?		
<p>Photos: 20 photos are required from each student</p> <p><u>Photo categories:</u> Moving in day, Academic experiences, Making friends, Dorm life, Clubs and Sports events, Managing my time, and Off campus events; visits to restaurants, museums, sporting events and entertainment. Collection of photos also include AMC buildings, the chapel, and AMC personnel such as the President, Dean of Student Affairs, campus security, support staff such as financial aid, admissions, and dining hall staff.</p> <p>The photos from each individual cannot represent all of same category. Students may offer other suggestions for photo categories with instructor’s approval.</p> <p>Each photo is required to have a short description.</p> <p>Each group will be responsible for one category. Students must log in with their AMC user name and must post their own photos. Digital photo journal website is:</p> <p>http://amc100.annamaria.edu</p>	5	
<p>Group Participation: Group sign in is a necessary component to this presentation.</p>	5	

<p>Text and sound: This digital photo journal will include comments, text, sound, and labels for photos. Power point is the suggested software package to be used for this project. The presentation must flow as a “story” and must be self-explanatory; narration must be included.</p>	<p>5</p>	
<p>Total 15 Points</p>	<p><i>Points Earned /15</i></p>	<p>Additional Comments</p>

The following are some of the samples of photographs students posted on the website for the photo journal. The photographs will be archived for future viewing.



Presented by Jennifer Ngandu-Mason and Joan Beth Gow, Ph.D., Anna Maria College, Paxton, MA for the 31st Annual Conference on The First Year Experience, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.