



Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

Incorporating Authentic Assessments in Large GEP Humanities Courses

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Rationale:

In order to promote engagement in large online classes and to further demonstrate the relevance of general-education humanities courses in the academic pathways and lives of students, I developed a short writing activity, an authentic assessment, connecting the learning content directly to the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring 2020 semester. This is an activity that I have carried over into the summer and fall 2020 semesters as an opportunity for students to connect their learning to current events and to provide a moment of catharsis for everyone coping in these challenging times.

Description:

1. Present learning unit: "Death, Technology, and Immortality": In this unit--which concludes the larger theme of the course: "Monsters and Mad Scientists: An Exploration of Science and the Humanities"--students examine "undead" monsters, vampires and zombies, and the various meanings they represent. Through works like Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and the various zombie incarnations in 20th and 21st century film and television, students conclude that these monsters represent contagion anxiety and our fears of losing agency over our bodies.
2. Assign short writing assignment (Discussion). Prompt: What does it mean to be human in the 21st century? Connect what you have learned in this module to a current problem we are facing. How can what you have learned in this class help solve the problem you have mentioned?
3. Allow students a week's time to develop their response and then engage in discussion with classmates.
4. Assess assignment using detailed discussion writing rubric

Appraisal:

I have not conducted formal evaluation; however students responded favorably to the assignment, producing thought-provoking responses and engaging with the materials and with their peers in discussion. Average grades for this assignment were high. This is just one example of an assignment that can allow for student-generated examples and connections (not just those assigned from a prompt), and it can be modified for different disciplines.

References:

Angelo, Thomas and K. Patricia Cross. *Classroom Assessment Techniques*. 2nd ed.(1993).

Link or explanation: I do not have a link readily available; however, here is the assignment prompt:

Prompt: What does it mean to be human in the 21st century? Connect what you have learned in this module to a current problem we are facing. How can what you have learned in this class help solve the problem you have mentioned?