***Authentic Learning***

This unit explores the concept of authentic learning, a crucial component of Wilmington University's commitment to providing students with career-relevant academic experiences.  At the end of this unit, faculty will be able to:

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| **Objectives** | 1. Define authentic learning and compare and contrast authentic and traditional classroom learning experiences.
2. Summarize the impact authentic learning opportunities will have on different teaching situations (classroom engagement, assessment, grading, etc.).
3. Construct a course relevant authentic learning experience for students.
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| **Assessments** | Mastery level: post-teaching reflection |

**Resources**

***What is authentic learning?***

Authentic learning refers to a wide variety of instructional techniques that focus on connecting what students are taught in the classroom to the real-world applications, issues, and problems facing professionals today.

* [This article](http://edglossary.org/authentic-learning/) further explores the concept of authentic learning

***How does authentic learning impact student learning?***

Through use of authentic learning techniques and assessments, the thought is that students will be more interested in what they are learning and more motivated to apply concepts that are easily identifiable as necessary for life outside of school.

* The [characteristics of authentic learning](https://prezi.com/ctbmwraepxdk/10-characteristics-of-authentic-learning-activities/) activities
* More information [on authentic learning](http://www.ernweb.com/educational-research-articles/the-four-characteristics-of-authentic-learning/)

***How will authentic learning impact my teaching practices?***

Real-life has many complexities and ambiguities built-in and authentic learning experiences should be no different. Often-times there aren’t clear cut “right” or “wrong” answers for student work, as open-ended questions are presented to students, or ill-defined problems are presented for students to work on. In this manner authentic learning should strive to teach students ***how to think like*** a professional in a given field, ***not necessarily what to think***. The primary goal of an authentic learning experience is to encourage students to think deeper about an issue, approach answering tough questions, and to consider multiple forms of evidence in navigating these situations.

Faculty should aim to develop authentic learning assessments that culminate in students making some form of genuinely useful contribution to their community or field of study. For example, behavioral science students might study the still relatively new phenomenon of social media engagement on one’s self-esteem by conducting research into the topic, developing a relevant survey for their peers to complete, and doing some basic data analysis on their results.

***How should I approach adding authentic learning exercises to my class agenda?***

For this module we encourage faculty to take a look at an upcoming class agenda, and try to convert a planned traditional activity or assessment into an authentic learning exercise as outlined above.

If you would like to discuss this topic, or to forward your planned activity or assessment to the CTE for feedback please feel free to send us an email at facultydevelopment@wilmu.edu.

***How do I earn credit for this learning unit on my Pathway to Instructional Excellence?***

Our authentic learning module is designated as a CTE (Center for Teaching Excellence) Mastery Level Elective. At this level, the CTE is looking to see faculty reflection on your usage of this particular instructional technique recently in the classroom. Of particular interest is how usage of this teaching skill contributed to student learning. Please address the following in your reflection:

* First-identify the action taken. Discuss the previous teaching experience that led to your decision to try this new instructional technique, assessment method, or approach to communication in the classroom. Discuss how what you learned in this unit was applied in the classroom.
* Second-reflect on the new teaching experience and its outcome. What did you observe from students? Did student understanding of learning outcomes or your expectations improve? Did the experience contribute to more engaging class sessions or student motivation? Did the experience provide students with more practical application of course learning content? Please note, whether the answers are yes or no to these questions, we can learn and grow as faculty members-so please be as honest as possible in your reflection.
* Finally-please provide a follow-up on this reflection. What might you do moving forward to help to continue to improve student learning outcomes? How might this activity be refined to anticipate learner needs? How might communication of your expectations been improved moved forward? Etc..

**CTE-Pathways to Instructional Excellence-Mastery Level Evaluation**

Faculty reflections will be reviewed during reading week of each block and will be assessed as either “Complete” or “Incomplete.” Complete reflections:

* Analyze why the instructional update would be predicted to help facilitate student learning
* Demonstrate understanding of learner-centered instruction through reflection of the student experience
* Assess how this technique can be used in the future to improve student learning

Faculty members whose reflections are rated “Complete” will earn a *Mastery Level* certificate for this learning unit. Reflections rated as incomplete will be provided feedback by members of the CTE and faculty will be provided the opportunity to consult with the CTE prior to resubmission. Submissions will be reviewed during reading week each block.