

FOUR QUESTIONS ASSIGNMENT

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Also write a few comments about why you enrolled in this course. Be honest.

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Center for Teaching

Notes to Instructors

Assignment: “Write four specific questions about the subject of this course that you want answered during this semester. Also write a few comments about why you enrolled in this course. Be honest.”

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What is the teaching/learning rationale for the assignment?

Every course is a learning process in which the instructor guides students to find their own answers—individually and together. The Four Questions assignment spurs students to consider their own intellectual curiosity and why they are taking a particular course—whether it is required or an elective. The assignment also signals to students that the instructor will not be doling out the answers to these questions who passively write down the answers. Instead, the semester will be a learning process

Benefits of assignment:

- Students take control of their own learning experience
- Questions inform instructor about why students signed up for course and what they know/don't know
- For students who were “forced” to take the course (“It’s a required course”; “It was the only open course left on campus”; etc.), the assignment forces them to consider that they might learn something during the semester, despite the fact they didn’t choose to be there.
- Helps instructor shape the course to the intellectual needs and interests of the students
- Culled and collated, questions can be transformed into a pre-test of knowledge. Students take the “test” (ungraded) and you (and they) learn what they know/don't know. Can be used again at mid-term and at semester’s end to demonstrate students’ learning curve
- Helps you connect early in the semester with students, who appreciate being asked why they enrolled in the course and what they expect to learn from it.
- Excellent framework for mid-term or end-of-term individual or small group conferences. If some questions haven’t been “answered” by the end of the semester, they can be explored during conferences.
- Powerful way to show students their learning curve. Can be particularly effective for those who were “forced” to take the course or those who didn’t get the grade they think they deserve. Redirects attention from grades to learning.