



## Historic Costume: Assignment Overload Solutions Tammy R. Kinley, University of North Texas

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The traditional historic costume class covers historical, sociological, cultural, and costume content from 3000 BCE to the early 2000's. Faculty must strategically decide which rabbit holes to pursue, particularly when the course must be covered in one semester. Further, this class generally lends itself to a lecture format, allowing an enrollment size limited only by the size of the lecture hall. In addition to a great deal of content, the professor must also decide among an endless assortment of relevant and interesting projects to enhance deeper learning.

Processing Fluency Theory is when consumers [students] attend to experiential attributes (sensory or affective), they process them fluently, that is, spontaneously and with little effort (Schwarz & Clore, 1996). This theory is particularly applicable to the academic setting wherein students with different learning styles and interests can take a deeper dive into content that (a) interests them and (b) makes difficult content more meaningful to them and/or easier to understand.

### Strategy 1: Assignment Menu

In this large enrollment class, grading assignments can easily become overwhelming, and frankly, boring. In order to make this process more meaningful for students and for the teacher, I adopted a menu of assignments from which students must select four over the course of the semester. These assignments are designated as "P4" on the syllabus, and almost all are available for the student to complete from the first day of the semester. The deadlines for all assignments somewhat align with course content and are therefore not flexible. The first four assignments completed by the student are graded. Each assignment is designed to take approximately the same amount of time and all are worth 30 points each (total of 120 points). Additional highlights include:

- Specific guidelines for each assignment are on Canvas on the Home page in the "Pick 4" category.
- All assignments must be submitted in Canvas unless otherwise directed. Grading rubrics are included with the assignments.
- APA citations are expected for any source used other than the students' original research.

- If the student submitted an assignment that they decide they do not want to have graded after all, they are to send an email to me within 24 hours of the due date asking for it to be pulled. If it is graded, it counts. Assignments will not be graded before the due date.
- All due dates are firm.

In an attempt to keep the assignments interesting, I have tried to provide a variety that speak to a number of interests including:

- Movie, Documentary, or specific Television episodes / Quiz and Sketches
- Visit a Museum Exhibition
- Complete an Interview (about clothing during a 20<sup>th</sup> century decade)
- Virtual Museum Tour w/ VR Goggles
- Period Magazine Article Summaries (Ebony, Vogue, Delineator)
- Attend one-hour lectures with the director of our costume collection

### Observations

A small percentage of students will complete their four assignments before the semester gets busy (as advised). However, a good number push to the end of the semester. The last four assignments tend to be the most popular, though some are admittedly submitted before midterm.

Student feedback has been extremely positive to me personally, on my course evaluations, and in the student advising appointments. Students appreciate both the range of assignments and the due dates scattered throughout the semester, which allows them to work them into their planners in a way that reduces stress. One student also told me that she appreciated that she could watch the movie and not have to worry about the assignment because she had already submitted her four assignments. Another student made terrible grades on the quizzes, but some of his sketches are framed in my office. Students also express appreciation for opportunities to learn more in depth on the topics of interest to them.

The strongest takeaway for students is that they have control over their grade because they can work to their strengths. The strongest advantage for the teacher is less monotony in grading. It is also interesting when you can have a discussion in class with the sub-group that watched a particular documentary. Their insights inspire others.

### Strategy 2: No Exams

A second strategy to reduce anxiety in this class was to eliminate the traditional 4- or 5-chapter exams. This assessment has been replaced with a quiz over each chapter. Each quiz

opens on Thursday afternoon and closes on Saturday night. Each quiz is comprised of 15 questions from a question bank containing about 50 questions, is worth 30 points, and is timed at 15 minutes. Since they are delivered via Canvas, the questions are designed to accommodate the open-note format. Questions are multiple choice, true/false, and short answer. Images on the quizzes are not the ones in the lectures; open-ended questions begin with, “As discussed in lecture [the readings] to limit the value of a Google search resulting in a response that is out of context for the class content.

#### Observations

There is a lot of content on the Internet, much of it tagged with my course number. This necessitates regular updating! The more students engage though, the more they are prone to remember the content.

Predictably grades have improved. In the traditional 4-exam format, overall exam averages ranged from 72.6% to 72.9%. Overall quiz averages for the same content, delivered one chapter at a time, range from 79.1% to 80.63%. Overall pass rate in the class, via overall grade distribution has improved each semester.

#### **Bibliography:**

Schwarz, N. & Clore, G. (1996). Feelings and Phenomenal Experiences. In: Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles. Guilford, Editors: E. Tory Higgins, A. W. Kruglanski, pp.433-465