

Engaging Students in Life-Changing Learning

Royal Roads University's Learning and Teaching Model in
Practice - Revised Edition

Edited by Stephen L. Grundy, Doug Hamilton, George
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Creativity Takes Courage: Integrating Video Assignments into Academic Courses and Blended Programs

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Abstract

While the integration of technology has become more commonplace in academic classrooms, many instructors hesitate to integrate video assignments into courses. This chapter addresses how to frame video assignments and manage expectations of both students and instructors, discusses how to integrate and benefit from video assignments in individual courses and across programs, and concludes with a step-by-step guide to embracing creativity and courage in order to engage with a different format for assignments. Drawing on a wide range of interdisciplinary research and resources related to creating engaging assignments and pedagogy, to fostering soft skills at the workplace, this chapter is focused on best practices and safeguarding academic rigor while providing students with different types of learning opportunities. Examples of video assignments are provided, as well as guidance for instructors and students on how to maximize and master the learning experience that comes with video assignments. The chapter argues that video assignments have a wide potential for application in courses and across programs, and that they support cohort and community building. Thereby, video assignments are a great addition to blended and online courses.

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1. Introduction and Context

The use of videos, animated clips, and presentations in the academic classroom has become increasingly commonplace and reflects the everyday use of interactive technology and reliance on multi-media sources translated into the educational context. Instructors use technology in their classrooms (both online and face-to-face) to bring in guest speakers, enhance lectures with TEDtalks or documentaries, and conduct technology-assisted simulations. They use PowerPoint, Prezi, or similar technology to present their materials and teach students content related to their class and program.

However, there is often strong hesitation related to the use of video submissions for academic assignments. Students and instructors commonly raise the following concerns: video assignments are time-consuming for all parties involved, they are of less academic value and relevance to programs of study (outside the context of film, professional communication, or marketing degrees, for example), and they require high levels of technological knowledge. This paper will explore the potential and benefits of video assignments as far more extensive. It offers solutions for addressing concerns and challenges and provides recommendations for how to integrate video assignments into academic courses.

2. Framing Video Assignments and Addressing Expectations

To a large extent, the framing of a video assignment does not differ from other, more traditional assignments; it falls into the category of creating engaging assignments (Fiorentino, 2004; Nisly, Cecire, Friesen, & Sensenig, 2015; Swinth & Vinton, 1994). For any assignment, instructors have a particular (learning) purpose around which they provide students with a specific question or challenge. Assignments follow learning objectives and include assessment criteria or an assessment rubric (Greenberg, 2015). Whether they are working in the context of teamwork or individual assignments, students are required to demonstrate academic knowledge and abilities, and to connect course materials, readings, and independent research to address a concrete problem by critically engaging, reflecting, evaluating, and presenting their own analysis and view on the subject matter (Lim, Pellett, & Pellett, 2009; Schultz & Quinn, 2014). Beyond standard academic requirements including referencing, instructors will specify the parameter of assignments such as length and scope, format and materials to be used, as well as anticipated output. Assignments generally include an outline of scope, purpose, and relevance of the assignment to the course/program learning.

This section will cover aspects specific to framing video assignments and address concerns and expectations as they relate to both students and

instructors. Some examples of different video assignments can be found in the appendices.

2.1 Setting Expectations and Outcomes

For many students—not only adult learners and returning students—the learning curve of academic writing and critical thinking is high. Producing academic materials differs from the report writing, compilation of materials, and documentation common to the average workplace. Most university programs offer academic writing and critical thinking courses. Additionally, they integrate research methods, methodology courses, or other components into their offerings to support students in their transition into academic writing.

When framing a video assignment for an academic context, this becomes particularly relevant as the presentation format is different, yet the content is not. Video assignments are not a simple recording of opinion statements or compilation of existing materials. Rather, they are a demonstration of the ability to critically engage with existing materials, concepts, and ideas, to present reflections, and to expand one's learning inside and outside of the academic classroom. Video assignments, like academic writing, are to follow conventions, such as APA referencing, respecting copyright, not plagiarizing, and generally attributing thoughts and materials to their source of origin (Greenberg, 2015; Sword, 2012). The key difference is that video assignments allow a visual dimension of presenting ideas, concepts, and connecting thoughts and materials in different ways; allow students to extend their comfort zone and thereby learn more effectively.

As producing a video clip is likely unfamiliar to most students, it is important to manage expectations for the anticipated outcome. This includes a focus on academic content over stylistic presentation; students are not expected to produce a feature motion picture outcome, but rather, to present a cohesive narrative in a visual format (Bakker et al., 2011; Willis, 2009). While a simple slideshow will be insufficient to meet academic standards, connecting images, existing clips, new materials, and a narrator voice/text are likely to yield positive results and higher grades for a video assignment.

Similar to supporting students in acquiring academic writing skills, guidance in the production of a successful video assignment is helpful (RRU Library, 2015). Storyboarding is likely the simplest and most important support structure for video assignments (Kay, 2014; Lim et al., 2009; Marks & Thomas, 2014; Thorn, 2011). Whether a video assignment is set to address a particular question (similar to an essay question) or a series of questions (similar to an exam), a video assignment can replace either an in-classroom presentation or a written submission. Ultimately, a video assignment provides engaging and diverse opportunities for student assessment of learning, including breaking up the common cycle of reading and writing alone by adding further dimension.

2.2 Open Ended Questions and Space for Creativity

Open-ended questions often leave space for the most creativity and diverse analysis of the problem or challenge presented to students; there is no difference between regular written and video assignments (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2015; Nisly et al., 2015). Open-ended questions in the context of video assignments can range from self-introduction and defining concepts to presenting cases and skills (see examples in appendix). Video assignments enable students to compile their own materials, to mix and match written and audio-visual materials, integrating animation, pictures, art, music, different speakers, and of course their own voice into their response to the open question (CTET, 2015). The less restrictions imposed through format and technology use, the more diverse and creative (Schultz & Quinn, 2014; Truong-White & McLean, 2015) will be the responses. This includes leaving space for different levels of ability for dealing with technology and compiling audio-visual materials.

Setting expectations that place an emphasis on content, critical thinking, and analysis over motion-picture quality will enable students to engage with different styles for presenting and learning information (Bakker et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2009). The goal is to allow students to stretch their comfort zone while engaging with the course materials (Borbye, 2010; Harrison, Starks, & Denhardt, 2011; Nehyba, 2011). Through the open framing of delivery, we have observed students do the following: use existing written, visual, and audio materials; integrate their own songs and music to represent conflict; use props such as Barbie dolls or Lego to present conflict interaction or tsunami aftermath as disasters; present newscast type interviews with themselves to answer the questions provided; and connect their professional work as an air traffic controller to demonstrate conflict and competing interests (CTET, 2015). The limits of what can (and will) be done are set by the students in response to open questions. The framing of the video assignment by the instructor will guide them in the context parameters and empower their creativity.

2.3 Establishing Learning Objectives and Academic Rigor

Not every assignment in every course may be a good fit for a video assignment—the video format must be relevant to the purpose of the assignment (Bakker et al., 2011; Nisly et al., 2015). In other words, framing a video assignment must include how the format is relevant for the task and for achieving the learning objectives (Viñes, López, Manrique, & Alonso, 2008). Learning outcomes may be established at a program and/or course level, with each assignment in a course indicating how it will be assessed in regards to these objectives and outcomes (Bahous & Nabhani, 2011; Hill, 2012; Siefert, 2011). Sometimes the wording of learning outcomes provide challenges (or limitations) in regards to the use of video assignments; common wording used in learning outcomes includes language such as “compiles and presents written materials in a coherent fashion.” Accommodating other submission

formats needs to be taken into consideration when generating learning outcomes.

In many ways, most assignments can be easily adjusted to allow video submission for the simple reason that learning objectives and academic requirements are the same, irrespective of the submission format, as outlined above. The learning objectives and outcomes assist students and instructors to distinguish a “nice video” from an “excellent video assignment,” again similar from a passing to an outstanding paper (Greenberg, 2015; Kay, 2014). For example, a video assignment that records a student outlining her or his arguments in relation to the question assigned might receive as high (or higher) a grade than a video that integrates music and images from a range of different sources but lacks academic content. The relevance of the materials used in combination to the ideas presented highlight the essence and academic expectation of a video assignment.

2.4 Assessing Video Assignments, Grading and Feedback

From an instructor perspective, the grading of a video assignment is not necessarily different nor more time-consuming or cumbersome than grading a written assignment. This may be surprising to many instructors, and at the same time it can address some resistance related to workload issues, specifically when it comes to the time consuming task of grading written assignments. If students submit 3-5 minute clips, watching the submission is time-bound and the review, feedback, and comments take similar or less time compared to written submissions. A grading rubric can further assist in providing feedback and facilitate a speedy assessment (Greenberg, 2015), which may be of particular interest when teaching larger classes.

Most video assignments can be based on more traditional assignment formats, i.e. framing similar tasks for students to demonstrate their knowledge and learning related to a particular course, program, and topic. Some examples for video assignments can be found in the appendices.

The assessment and related feedback for video assignments should highlight an adequate presentation of ideas, concepts, and analysis; in other words, focus on academic content. Presentation and style may be considered relevant, though generally of less important (academic) value in this context. Feedback for students that focuses on the relevance of their content can also include how their delivery method matches their intention and supports their narrative (CTET, 2015). Some examples:

- Is background music necessary and complementary to the presentation of content, e.g. instrumental music instead of spoken voice or a self-written song capturing personal history conveyed in the clip?
- Are the pictures or images connected to the critical analysis and content, e.g. using images of the World Trade Center memorial waterfalls for an

assignment regarding resource conflicts or demonstrating the impact of a tsunami wave using Lego figures in a bathtub?

- Has existing material been enhanced (mashed) by adding one's own interpretation and understanding of theoretical concepts, e.g. using an existing clip from a Sesame Street skit, used by one student as is and shown by another student to highlight escalation and de-escalation of conflict by adding captions into the existing material?

Instructors may consider how they communicate their feedback, offering for instance a written narrative or a recording of their own.

2.5 Recording Devices, Technical Guidance for Hosting and Submitting

The framing of a video assignment should provide guidance regarding the use of technology – and where to find support for use of video technology (RRU Library, 2015). While it is important to encourage students to stretch their comfort zones and familiar formats, the time required to work with technology should not overshadow a focus on content. It might be safe to assume that students have at least one device at their disposal that enables them to record for the purposes of a video assignment. Most mobile phones include a camera that can create video material, built-in cameras on laptops or computer screens are common, and even digital cameras can be used to record clips. When students are asked to record their own material, privacy and ethical issues must be taken into consideration (Talab & Butler, 2007). It might therefore be important to discourage students from recording others and rather work with materials available or animation (e.g. Powtoon). Generally, technology available for producing video material is less of an obstacle than it might appear.

Having created video material, most students will need to edit their content. This can be achieved in various ways, including the software often provided with digital recording devices, available on computers, or the uploading functions of video hosting platforms such as YouTube. Students will often struggle with editing their materials and keeping their submission within a given time limit. If an assignment requires more than simply recording themselves, different editing tools might be required and can generate challenges of a different kind for students. Facing technology challenges, most students will quickly engage in a dialogue with each other to tackle the hurdles and making the assignment work. Most video editing programs, such as the YouTube video manager, come accompanied by many help and instructional videos that can be easily found online. Thereby, easily available resources providing technical guidance mitigate the impact of the technology on students and instructors (RRU Library, 2015).

Hosting video assignments comes with a range of concerns and benefits, ranging from technical to more personal/privacy related issues. Learning Management Systems (LMS) often have a size limit for file uploads. For

example, the standard setting on the Moodle LMS platform is a 20MB maximum file limit for student submissions. Depending on the recording, video submission can be larger files, which may require relying on hosting services such as YouTube or MediaCore (RRU, 2015). Some video hosting and sharing services may require the consideration of privacy issues, including storage on US-based servers or the requirement to create an account and determine the availability of a clip (e.g. 'unlisted,' 'private,' or 'public'). While simply uploading a video file might appear an easy way around the hosting issues, this can create other challenges such as the inability to watch certain files on different operating software (e.g. Mac/iOS versus Windows) or browser functionality. Generally, when considering hosting options it is essential to provide guidance and keep it simple in order to avoid technology challenges overshadowing the learning experience.

3. Integrating and Benefitting From Video Assignments in Programs and Courses

Some aspects of the benefits of video assignments depend on and relate to specific programs of study or even particular courses. Overall, video assignments benefit from being integrated into programs and courses rather than being isolated events. Enabling students to improve their skills to portray their message and analysis in video assignments will be most beneficial when assignments are not simply replaced with video options but rather used at several intervals and where the video fits best in their overall program flow.

Generally speaking, using an introductory video assignment at the beginning of a program of study, for example in a foundations course, is likely to set a solid basis for continuing integration of technology, and includes other benefits, as the following will discuss. After the first video assignment, and as appropriate thereafter, 'review and reflect' sessions can debrief the students' experience and set the learning into the particular context. Over the course of the debrief, students themselves will overcome frustration with technology and highlight their benefits from the learning experience, which can range from overcoming fear of the unknown to community building, addressing different learning styles, and enhanced peer learning. The following sections highlight some key learning benefits from video assignments.

3.1 Improving Skills Over Time: Regular Sequence Rather Than One-Off

Similar to how students improve their academic writing over the course of their program by increasingly going from writing shorter, simpler documents to longer, more complex pieces, the expectations related to video assignments should increase over time. This relates to expectations of depth and complexity of the materials and ideas presented, the level of analysis and critical thinking, and clarity of thoughts and line of argument. Allowing students to learn and improve their academic writing is one aspect of

completing university studies, which is complemented by learning and improving academic presentation skills (Nisly et al., 2015; Price, Strodman, Brough, Lonn, & Luo, 2015; Sword, 2012). Video assignments, integrated throughout a program of study, further complement this aspect of learning. It can be achieved by continuously requiring video assignments throughout a program, for example in more than one or two courses. This practice improves the ability to present information in certain formats, written and audio-visual alike.

In addition to including video assignments and improving skills in video formats, instructors can encourage video posts in the learning management system to complement, enhance, or even replace written posts. Similar to practicing critical thinking in written posts, students can practice video skills through their posts. As a result, any course becomes overall more engaging and interactive rather than being one-dimensional based on written words alone.

3.2 Beyond the Classroom: Individual Skills and Marketability

The ability to present information and convey knowledge in a range of formats is a beneficial skill in many professions, which students will take from their video assignments in class to their respective workplace (Kyllonen, 2013; McCarthy & Hatcher, 2002). This includes being better able to communicate with multi-media production specialists by having a more than basic understanding of how to present key information in various visual formats. Furthermore, the ability to analyse and critique visual materials provides students with another marketable skill for their individual toolbox and professional development.

The confidence to appear in and present a self-edited video further contributes to the confidence of students to present and defend their own ideas in videoconferences, presentations, or talks in the classroom and in their professional lives. While students would normally acquire this kind of skill in classroom presentations (McCarthy & Hatcher, 2002), this is more difficult to replicate in blended or online course formats. There are fewer opportunities for presentations and classroom discussions as face-to-face time is more limited. It is easier to mull over and carefully compose posts in writing, drafting, and editing in the comfort of your own home. Perceived provocations or misunderstandings resulting from posts can be excused or explained away by the delivery format, e.g., being written in haste or language/cultural differences. A video submission (or post) adds another dimension where it is possible to set a tone and context, to show one's face and non-verbal communication for further context. Depending on how it is framed, a video assignment results in a product closer to a classroom presentation or plenary discussion. The diversity of how video assignments are framed over the course of a program of study can further enhance individual skills building and marketability.

3.3 Generating Learning Communities: Learning From and With Peers

Building a strong sense of community or cohort is more challenging to achieve in blended programs, where students rarely meet face-to-face and are also scattered across the country, and even the globe (Luppincini, 2007; Tu, 2004). Facing a challenging task together, such as a video assignment, early on in the program can help facilitate community building. Students bond over the experience and interaction; sharing the technical problems and solving them together, they see each other and share in a manner similar to how they would in a face-to-face classroom—or in the hallways (Brown, Rich, & Holtham, 2014). When students meet in person, they already have a more personal frame of reference by having met their peers not only online, but through video as well. This makes the group move forward more quickly, including creating social events and arranging transportation to campus together rather than each on their own. Overall this supports strengthening the safe learning space that the classroom is to provide, based on trust, respect, and mutual engagement. In many ways this represents the cohort model at its best (Malisius, 2013; RRU, 2013; Seed, 2008).

Beyond the community building aspect, video assignments enable students to learn from each other alongside learning with each other (Lillejord, Riese, & Samara, 2012). Being exposed to topics and materials outside the formal readings and resources for a course supports students in a holistic learning approach. For example, in a conflict analysis and management program, a student working in the health industry might be exposed to an ethno-political conflict based on a video assignment from a peer. While the learning might be more indirect, such exposure empowers each individual student to see beyond their own areas of interest and expertise while transferring the knowledge they acquire from their program of study more widely.

3.4 Benefitting From Diversity: Maximizing Teaching and Learning Styles

Exposing the students to a wider range of materials and modes of presentation benefits the instructor as much as the students. As students share their submissions, the instructor becomes a guide to the learning process rather than being the sole, isolated subject matter expert. Furthermore, the connection to the individual student becomes stronger as it is easier to get to know students in the distance-learning environment if there is a face to the name and posts/written words. This includes making sure all voices in the classroom are heard, even those who might be less inclined to speak up.

Furthermore, through video assignments, it becomes easier to accommodate different learning styles (Hatami, 2013; Rolfe & Cheek, 2012; Yassin & Almasri, 2015), including but not limited to more visual and creative learners. The engagement with both visual and written materials and engagement addresses learning and teaching in a more holistic fashion across all learning styles (Kolb, 1984). In many ways, video assignments are a logical extension

of the approach to integrate are more diverse and multi-media materials into learning and teaching and acknowledging different learning styles.

4. Conclusion

Integrating video assignments into academic courses is easier than it might appear. Building on the general advice provided throughout the paper, the following section summarizes lessons learned on how to integrate video assignments to the benefit of students and instructors, following the motto of “creativity takes courage,”—a quote commonly attributed to artist Henri Matisse.

4.1 Vagueness Helps Creativity

While all assignments require clear instructions and expectations, a little vagueness helps foster creativity. In other words, do not be too prescriptive regarding format and content when you set up a video assignment. Students will be more focused on fitting your parameters and expectations than really engaging with the challenge and the materials and presenting their own take on the subject matter. The video format enables students to express themselves in a freer, less commonly used format and thereby has the potential to set them free to explore how and what they want to present. The more restrictions you impose by very detailed instructions and criteria, the less you will see creativity. Have the courage to allow for a little bit of vagueness to make space for creativity.

Of course this element of vagueness does not preclude from setting expectations, a grading rubric, and good instructions on how to work with technology to support the students in their efforts. Be clear on the formal parameters, but vague on the specifics. Encourage students to gain practice and confidence from perseverance and to benefit from overcoming vagueness and unusual challenges. After all, overcoming challenges is a lot of what academic studies are all about—encourage students to embrace challenges and vagueness with confidence and creativity.

4.2 Creativity Helps Out of the Comfort Zone

Faced with a video assignment, most students are likely to feel rather uncomfortable and on unfamiliar grounds. Providing space for creativity and making the assignment their own enables students to move outside their comfort zone. They can then look at the challenge rather than the expectations, find ways to make themselves shine, showcase what they can and want to do, and how they want to present themselves.

Most students notice very quickly what they can and cannot do given the limitations of a video assignment, the time available to them to make it work, as well as their access to resources and materials to complete the task at hand. They will become creative, looking around to identify existing video

materials, creating their own, putting together text, music, photographs, and images—along with academic materials and readings. As they explore the boundaries of their own abilities and creativity to overcome, students think outside the box—and outside their comfort zone—to take on a video assignment, putting ideas, words, and thoughts into moving pictures.

4.3 Out of Comfort Zone Helps Community

Anyone who is pushed or pulled out of their comfort zone usually seeks support from his or her community. As students start a program of study, their cohort or learning community is not quite there yet – fellow students are no more than a list of names and maybe profile pictures. Yet, facing a video assignment, students will quickly turn to each other and build trust amongst their peers as they overcome the challenge presented to them.

Faced with the challenge of producing a video assignment, students will ask for help in their surroundings, whether it is a partner, a child, a colleague, or a friend. Community building becomes an integral part of video assignments in a plethora of ways.

Students will find many ways to express their uncertainty and seek help with technology and content. Be patient and supportive—but do not try to fix things too much. The students will figure it out and turn to each other, sparking more creativity along the way. The common experience turns strangers randomly thrown together in a program into respected and trusted peers very quickly. As their community builds along, they may curse their instructor more than once, and at the same time relish in what they have accomplished in the end. As students share and showcase the results of their work in a compact short video format, the confidence they gain as individuals and as a community pays back the effort required.

4.4 Community Helps Learning

As students become engaged with and build their community, they increasingly learn from and with each other. This is common in face-to-face classrooms, where students share expertise and knowledge, explain readings or concepts presented, form study groups, or simply meet up for a coffee. All of these social elements are less common in the online or blended learning environments, simply because the contact is more disconnected and distant. Activities such as the video assignments support breaking down these barriers by strengthening the community and generating a safe space among the cohort. Completing a challenge such as a video assignment lessens the fear to engage with new materials and the unknown; it increases the interest to engage with other as friends rather than strangers, and it helps students to learn more about conflict as well as their selves in conflict (important both inside and outside a program of study focused on conflict analysis and management).

As the video assignment supports the community coming together, the learning increases manifold, both related to the program of study and to life beyond the classroom. The best learning journeys combine solitude and fellowship.

4.5 Learning Becomes Reflective Practice

Learning new concepts, ways of thinking, or ways of looking at the world and understanding what is happening are surely important parts (and motivation) of any program of study. Video assignments help enhance learning by turning it into reflective practice. As students improve their ways to turn information into audio-visual materials highlighting a particular aspect or content, they practice the following through reflection: What do I want to present? How do I want to present it? Who am I and what do I want to (re)present? How am I perceived and how do I present myself? Irrespective of the program of study, with more practice, the students embody reflective practice. Reflective practice in this context represents a systems approach to seeing the impact of the individual on the whole and engaging more holistically. Any interaction becomes active, pro-active, and reactive at the same time, embracing prevention and sustainability of knowledge and skills concurrently. Through reflective practice, students find and sharpen their own voice, making a difference in their own unique way.

In conclusion, there are many benefits from video assignments for learning inside and outside the classroom, for the individual student and cohort, the learning community and instructor, and lifelong learning. In many ways video assignments capture the essence of the Learning and Teaching Model and the present-day classroom, where technology is a tool that enables and enhances learning and teaching in an engaged and interactive manner across all media.

5. Appendices

The following are examples for video assignments from various courses and programs delivered at RRU.

5.1 CAMN 520 – Introduction to Conflict Management Processes (2013, MA/ Dip Conflict Analysis and Management)

Course developer and instructor: Dr. Eva Malisius

Assignment 1: Are you ready for conflict analysis and management practice?

To mark the beginning of your learning journey in the CAM program, you will compile a short video clip.

In addition to introducing yourself to your fellow students and instructor, the objective of the clip is to demonstrate your understanding of conflict analysis

and management practice as well as your readiness for engaging in the CAM program.

This assignment will be graded like any other assignment for the course or program, following the grading matrix provided. The 3-5 minute clip should be brief, concise, and analytical, demonstrating your reflection on the program, readings, and core themes outlined below. Please include references to readings/concepts throughout all sections as applicable.

Introduction

- Please include your name and hometown/place of residence
- Personal background
- What is your motivation for enrolling in the CAM program?
- Do you have any previous CAM related knowledge and training?
- What are your expectations for the program?

Definition of conflict

- What is conflict? What does it represent? What can be done about conflict?
- What makes conflict interesting and valuable?
- What makes conflict destructive and detestable?

Conflict example

- What is a typical example for conflict that you encounter in your private or professional life?
- What happens and what it is about? Who is involved? Why is it relevant to you?
- What would you like to (or what are you going to) do about it? What would make a difference in this conflict?

Conclusion and outlook

- Please include your expectations for the residency and this course in particular.

Length: 3 – 5 minute clip.

Graded: worth 20% of course grade.

5.2 GBLD522 – Managing Difficult Relationships Within and Across Community Dynamics (2014, MA Global Leadership)

Course developer and instructor: Dr. Eva Malisius

Assignment 1: Presenting a Community in Conflict

The purpose of this assignment is to enhance your awareness of the dynamics and tensions between and across stakeholders in an existing community. Identify a community that you are familiar with and/or one where you have access to public information about conflicts, tension, and challenges in that community. The choice is yours. You may choose: (a) a community that you have covered or heard about in a different course, (b) a community that you have worked with or would like to work in, or (c) the community you live in. Be mindful not to simply duplicate what has been done already in another course because you do not want to plagiarise yourself or others. If you choose a community that you have worked on previously, you will need to generate a new perspective on that community.

Make sure you are able to take a balanced stance to analyse and present the dynamics of your chosen community without bias or passion for a particular group or cause. Sometimes this can be difficult when you are analysing your own community or one that you have worked with very closely. Confirm the suitability of your choice with your instructor.

The key guiding questions for your assignment are:

- What defines this community?
- Who are the key actors?
- What are the dynamics, key challenges, and conflicts that face the community?

Determine the audience for your assignment. This can be either (a) the community leadership from whom you will require buy-in to implement a change process, (b) a donor/funding organization board that you are pitching a project funding proposal to, or (c) a more general audience that you are alerting to the situation in the community. Indicate your choice of audience at the beginning of the assignment and make sure you cater your assignment to your respective audience.

Describe your community in all its richness, highlighting its assets, analysing its dynamics, and acknowledging its challenges and complexities. Provide a brief background and basic statistical data for your community (geographical location, demographics and some historical facts). Limit this section to what is essential for understanding the wider context. Focus your assignment on the key dynamics of the community: what are key values shared? What are some underlying conflicts and how do they affect the relationships between the community groups? How does the community make decisions? How does the community interact with the national/regional level? How does it interact with other communities? What are the key challenges for community development?

At the end of your assignment, indicate your recommendations for the future

of the community and what could be done to address difficult relationships within and with other communities.

Your assignment may be presented as a written submission or a video.

Written submissions should not exceed 2,000 words (approximately eight double-spaced pages, not including cover page, table of contents or reference list; standard APA formatting and referencing applies). Accepted written formats are: a community profile to be posted on a professional, field-focused blog; a background report for an assessment of fact-finding visit; contributing material for a donor funding application; a public presentation at an academic conference; or a different format agreed upon with your instructor.

Video submissions should be 3-5 minutes. The presentation format is flexible (Prezi, narrated PowerPoint, Slideshare, or video clip). To find out more about putting together an engaging presentation, consult the RRU Library's guide on video or multimedia essays. Accepted visual formats are: a community profile to be posted on a professional, field-focused blog; a profile presentation to be posted on the website of a community, regional association, or international organization contributing visual material for a funding application to a donor; a public presentation at an academic conference; or a different format agreed upon with your instructor.

When choosing the video format for your assignment, make sure you reference materials using APA style and respect copyright. Do not underestimate the time commitment related to choosing the video format especially if this is a new process for you.

This assignment is due at the end of Week 5 and is worth 30% of your final grade.

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