

# **TILT: Transparency in Learning and Teaching**

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**SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE I'M READY  
FOR MY CLASSES THIS FALL**

**THEN I'M LIKE... WOW. THAT  
WAS A GREAT 23 SECONDS**

@AcademicBatgirl

**Focus question:** can you think of an assignment that didn't go as planned or you didn't get what you expected?

**THINK, PAIR, SHARE (6 mins)**



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# WHY THIS MATTERS (PURPOSE)

- This presentation will provide the foundation for:
  - What we mean by transparency for assignment design
  - Why we think transparent design will help you create/revise assignments likely resulting in greater student learning
  - Why this is an inclusive pedagogy



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# WHAT YOU WILL DO (TASK)

- Hold this new information to observe and consider
- Offer insights when you see connections
- Apply what you learn today to an assignment



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# WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE (CRITERIA)

- You will be successful today if you can:
  - Describe the concept of transparency in an assignment
  - Identify the main elements of the framework
  - Explain the theory behind the framework
  - Evaluate an assignment for a transparent design
  - Revise an assignment using the framework



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**“Really smart students  
can learn from anyone.”**



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**“Really smart students  
can learn from anyone.”**

What is this quote saying about student learning?

*Unpack* this quote with one or two fellow learners  
sitting next to you (5 min)



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“Really smart” students are the ones who really matter.

Those who can’t learn “from anyone” are not “really smart.”

Students who get the professor’s unwritten rules are the “really smart” ones; those who don’t are not really smart.

Students for whom our institutions were built are “really smart,” and those for whom they were not built are not really smart.



*I too am a flawed human with blind spots and biases and baked-in inequitable practices.*



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# So ...

Designing our assignments with peers--especially peers who are novice learners in our discipline/field— matters, ***because*** designing by ourselves, in isolation, we are unlikely to provide an equitable learning experience for all our students.

Novice learners, in this case, are your peers who are disciplinary strangers.



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## The Research Basis for the Transparency Framework

The Transparency Framework builds on **tested social-psychological interventions** shown to address student confidence, sense of belonging, doubts about ability, stereotype threat, fears about suitability or “fit” for field, career, etc.

These interventions were shown to increase student GPA, persistence, and retention, especially in underserved students.



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## The Research Basis for the Transparency Framework

The Transparency Framework is a **classroom-based intervention** that addresses

- **Academic confidence:** *I can learn math.*
- **Sense of belonging:** *I'm supposed to be here. College is hard--for everyone. My culture and values are reflected here.*
- **Improved mastery of skills that employers value:** *What I'm learning will help me reach my long-term goals.*



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# TODAY'S WORK

- **PURPOSE:** Share work around transparent assignment design and inspire you to adopt the framework.
- **TASK:** Review the characteristics of transparent assignments, discuss the impact on students, and talk about implementation.
- **CRITERIA:** Leave with an increased understanding of the TILT framework and a commitment to “TILTING” 2 assignments.



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# TODAY'S WORK

## char·rette

SHə'ret/ *noun*—An **intense** period of design or planning activity



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**TILT THIS**



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# TILT OVERVIEW – An Assignment Charrette



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- *What is it?*

# TILT OVERVIEW



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# TILT OVERVIEW

- *What is it?*
- *Does it work?*



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# TILT OVERVIEW

- *What is it?*
- *Does it work?*
- *How does it work?*



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- **PURPOSE: *WHY?*** Knowledge gained, skills and abilities (KSAs) practiced, important to the learner 5 months from now (or even 5 years from now).
- **TASK: *WHAT?*** Steps taken to accomplish the assignment. What to do (and/or what *not* to do).
- **CRITERIA: *HOW?*** What success looks like.

# The Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) in Higher Ed Project

- Student success from the classroom perspective.
- Driving question: What's the **SMALLEST** teaching intervention that faculty can use that will have the **BIGGEST** impact on student success and retention?
- Research based approach and **equity focused**.



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“Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Pacific Islander students are about half as likely to complete a four-year degree as their white and Asian classmates (US Department of Education). Completion rates for low-income students lag far behind those students whose family incomes are above the bottom quartile (Tough 2014). And first-generation college students are 51% less likely to graduate in four years than students whose parents completed college (Ishitani 2006).”

*Winkelmess et al, Peer Review, 2016*



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# UNLV RETENTION

## *TILT Higher Ed's Research Question:*

What is the effect when teachers provide **two transparently designed**, problem-based take home assignments on spring-term first-year college students' learning experiences, especially underserved students' experiences?



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# UNLV RETENTION

A follow-up TILT higher ed study conducted at UNLV found the benefits of this intervention (2 assignments TILTed) were long-term:

**Quantitative:** The students who received transparent instruction had 13% to 15% higher retention rates not just 1 year later . . . but 2 years later;

**Qualitative:** Increases in academic confidence, sense of belonging, sense of perceived transparency, sense of gaining employer-valued skills.



# TABLE ACTIVITY

- *What does a TILTed assignment look like?*



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# Table Activity I Part 1

- With your disciplinary stranger colleague (make sure you are partnering with someone from a different discipline) take the first **GREEN** assignment **SCI 101 Scientific Evidence** labeled **LESS TRANSPARENT**.



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(LESS TRANSPARENT)

SCI 101, Alison Sloat

Exercise 3: Scientific Evidence

Read through your example scientific poster and answer the following questions.

Title of your example poster:

1. What is the ethical question that is being asked?
2. What pieces of evidence do they provide in support of **and** in opposition of their question?  
In Opposition:  
In Support
3. Are the pieces of evidence from peer-reviewed scientific sources (look at the references to be sure)?

# Table Activity I Part 1

- With your disciplinary stranger colleague (make sure you are partnering with someone from a different discipline) take the first **GREEN** assignment **SCI 101 Scientific Evidence** labeled **LESS TRANSPARENT**.
- Discuss the **PURPOSE** of the assignment. What are the KSAs\* developed in this assignment? Underline the sections where you find these things.
- You have **8 minutes** for this discussion. Make sure each person contributes.

\*KSA = Knowledge, Skills, Abilities



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# Table Activity I Part 2

- For the same assignment (SCI 101), discuss what you believe are the **CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS**, (what are they keys to doing well on these assignments)?
- You have ***6 minutes*** for this discussion.



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# Share-out at your table



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# Table Activity II Part 1

- Review the handout (**BUFF Color**) of the More Transparent SCI 101 assignment. Find the **PURPOSE** and **CRITERIA** for each.



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## (MORE TRANSPARENT)

**SCI 101, Alison Sloat**

### **Exercise 3: Scientific Evidence**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this assignment is to analyze an existing scientific poster. This will increase your familiarity with how scientific posters are constructed, and will help you later in the course when you research, design, and create your own effective poster with sufficient scientific evidence that supports your conclusion. As a result of completing this assignment, you will be able to identify the sources of scientific information, interpret the results, and critically analyze the scientific merit of the conclusion of an existing scientific poster.

**Task:** Read through your example scientific poster and answer the following questions.

Title of your example poster:

# Table Activity III Part 1

- With your partner, review the handout (**BUFF Color**) of the More Transparent SCI 101 assignment. Find the **PURPOSE** and **CRITERIA** for each.
- Discuss.
- Will students do better on these assignments? Why?
- You have **10 minutes** for this activity.



# Table Activity III

- With your partner, repeat the activity with the **Before (GREEN)** and **After (BUFF)** assignments for **English**.
- Describe the changes the instructor made and how you think those changes will help students be more successful.
- You have **10 minutes** for this activity.



# Share-out at your table



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# What Are We Measuring?

## Ability and Learning



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# What Are We Measuring?

Ability and Learning

-or-

Good Guessing, Mind Reading,  
Opportunity, and Preparedness



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# What do students think and say?



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# What do students think and say?

## Less Transparent

- **Purpose:** “trying to learn.”
- **Skills:** “I would suspect...”
- **Criteria/Assessment:** “I don't know...” or “I would suspect...”

# What do students think and say?



# What do students think and say?

## More Transparent

- “It would greatly **increase my understanding and confidence** in what I’m being asked to do and my ability to answer questions.”
- “I would be able to do what I am supposed to instead of guessing and then getting the wrong idea.”

# What do students think and say?

## More Transparent

- “The more vague an assignment is, the more **STRESS** it puts on the student because they will be fishing through all of the information that is applicable and **trying to figure out** what...the instructor wants to know. By being as transparent as possible it **avoids frustration on both ends** and facilitates student success.”

# MORE TRANSPARENT: Work and Effort

- “I would get a better grade because I understand what I’m doing. Having a better understanding saves me time...when I could have already started the assignment.”
- “When an instructor puts forth more effort to help us and is more clear on what they want or expect from our assignment the more focused and determined I will be as a student.



# MORE TRANSPARENT: Work and Effort

- “I would feel much less frustration towards the instructor, and I feel confident that I would get better grades.”



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# MORE TRANSPARENT: Instructor Credibility

- “I will feel that the instructor is more organized.”
- “I would feel that the instructor wants to **set me up for success.**”
- “I would assume (with the revised assignment) that my teacher knows what they are doing and what they expect from me.”
- “I don’t know if the assignment reflects instructor performance, but if they were to give me the transparent assignment...I would find them more credible and seem to know what they’re doing.”





## The Transparency Framework in a nutshell:

### **Purpose:**

*I know why this assignment matters in this class.*

*I can see what skills my professor thinks I need to succeed on this assignment.*

*I understand what knowledge I'll be taking with me from this assignment and how that knowledge relates to my [program, career, real life].*



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## The Transparency Framework in a nutshell:

### Task:

*I know exactly what I have to do in order to meet my professor's expectations for a complete assignment.*

*I know what not to do and common mistakes to avoid.*

*I know now that other students have struggled with this assignment, so I won't feel alone or targeted when I struggle.*



## The Transparency Framework in a nutshell:

### Criteria for Success:

*I know what my professor's standards are and what my professor is paying attention to when I am graded. Success is based on meeting those standards.*

*I know exactly how my grade on this assignment will affect my grade in the class.*

*I've seen real "A-level" student work samples, so I know success is possible on this assignment.*



# Benefits for Faculty

- Intentional Alignment
- Raising the bar
- Meaningful Feedback
- Student-Faculty Relationships



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# The Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) in Higher Ed Project

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# EQUITY FOCUSED

- Ensure our systems, policies, and structures work better for students . . . in ways that impact LARGE numbers of students.
- Move Away from “boutique interventions” towards scale
- It’s not an add-on



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# EQUITY FOCUSED

We must work together as a community to:

- Increase the Completions of ALL Students
- Rigorously Focus on Equity– Close Equity Gaps



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# EQUITY FOCUSED

- **National Conversation:** “Ensure Student Learning”
- **In Washington State:** “Ensure ALL Students Have Access to Equitable Learning Environments.”



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# EQUITY FOCUSED

## Equity of Student Learning Matters

- ***To our GP Redesigns***
  - who is learning, who is not learning?
- ***To our enrollments***
  - who are we retaining in the short-term, who are we not retaining?
- ***To the quality of our completions***
  - who is completing, who is not completing?



# A Replicable, Scalable Intervention

- Simple, elegant, easily accessible strategy.
- Low-Stakes, Low-Tech, High Impact
- Inexpensive
- Sensible
- Engages Faculty, Engages Students
- Impact on Student Learning
- Institutional Impact



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# Teaching and Learning as Social Endeavors

“Teaching and learning are not solo accomplishments but social endeavors that are achieved in the context of the organization, through trusting relationships and teamwork, rather than competition and a focus on individual prowess . . .”

*Esther Quintero, [The Shanker Institute](#)*



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ASSIGNMENT NAME \_\_\_\_\_

COURSE \_\_\_\_\_

**PURPOSE**

*Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities needed to successfully complete this assignment:*

**TASKS**

**CRITERIA**

# Justin Ericksen, English Faculty, Whatcom



“After conducting assignment charrettes with other faculty at the TILT Institute, I was able to see my assignments through fresh eyes. I thought they were TILT-ed already, but the post assignment charrette revisions were intensive. Those conversations and work sessions were so enlightening and crucial to the process.”



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# Jill Darley-Vanis, English Faculty, Clark



“After nearly twenty years of doing this work, I can look back and map out my career in terms of trying to find a center or trying to get “there.” Professional development work with TILT has helped me realize more clearly that “there” is equity and social justice. Finally, we can create assignments that are not examples of faculty talking to themselves.”

# Andrea Reid, English Faculty, Spokane



“Partnering with a non-disciplinary colleague gave me the chance to hear her puzzle through the purpose, task, and criteria for a Composition assignment I had used for several quarters that was—clearly—not as clear as I thought it was. That moment convinced me of my own responsibility to create more transparent assignments that contribute to student success.”



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# Alys Hugo, Math Faculty, Everett



“After learning about TILT at ATL, I TILT-ed three assignments in Calculus 4. A main objective in my course is for students to find the *best* method to solve a problem . . . I saw fewer students solving problems the long way on homework and exams, and could tell that they were thinking critically about problems.”



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# Erin Huebner, Spanish Faculty, Spokane



“Based on the research about TILT, I expected to see evidence of closing gaps among my students. What I did not expect was to experience the closing of a gap between my students and myself. TILT breaks down the notion that students and instructors occupy adversarial positions in the educational arena. TILT does many things, and in my classroom, TILT builds trust.



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# Shanti Conners, Early Childhood Education, LWTech



“The transparency framework served as a guide for faculty in our program. We thought that our assignments were clear. When we implemented the framework in our program, we started to see that students who did not complete the assignments as expected were often missing pieces from the “assignment puzzle.”