# Transparent Assignment Design:
## *Clearer Assignments, Better Results*




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Photo: Maurício Mascaro

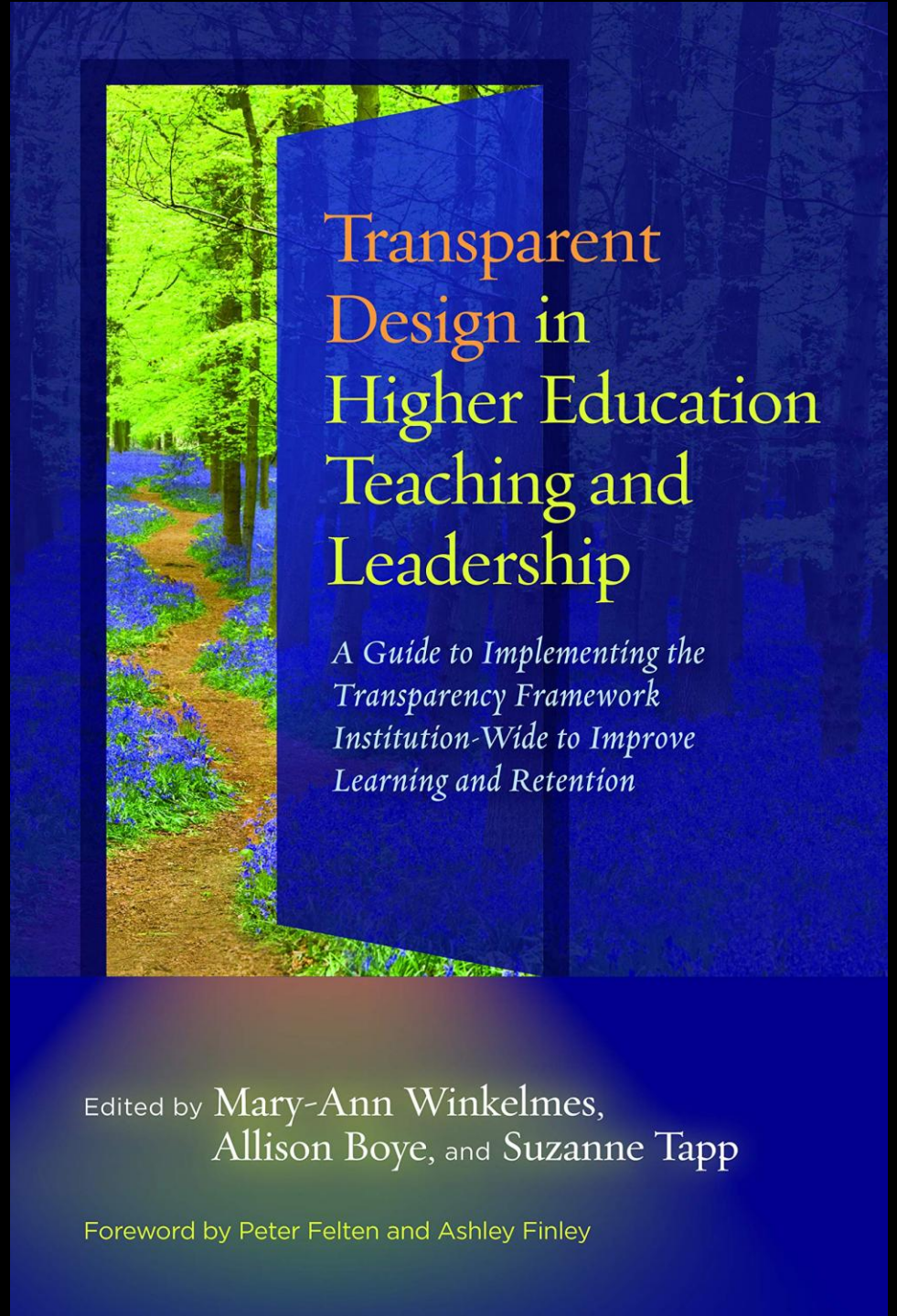
# Agenda

- Research around transparency in teaching & learning
- TILT Framework
- Examples
- Results
- Additional opportunities

# *Reflect*

Think about a time you gave students an assignment that yielded results that troubled you.

- *What did students seem to struggle with in completing the assignment successfully?*
- *What do you think went wrong?*




- **Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes**
  TILT Higher Ed Creator and Project Leader

- Featured in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Peer Review*, *National Teaching and Learning Forum*, *College Teaching*, and more

- Transparent teaching and learning methods explicitly focus on HOW and WHY students are learning course content in particular ways.

- More specifically, we are focusing on transparency in ***assignment design***

# *How does transparency benefit students?*

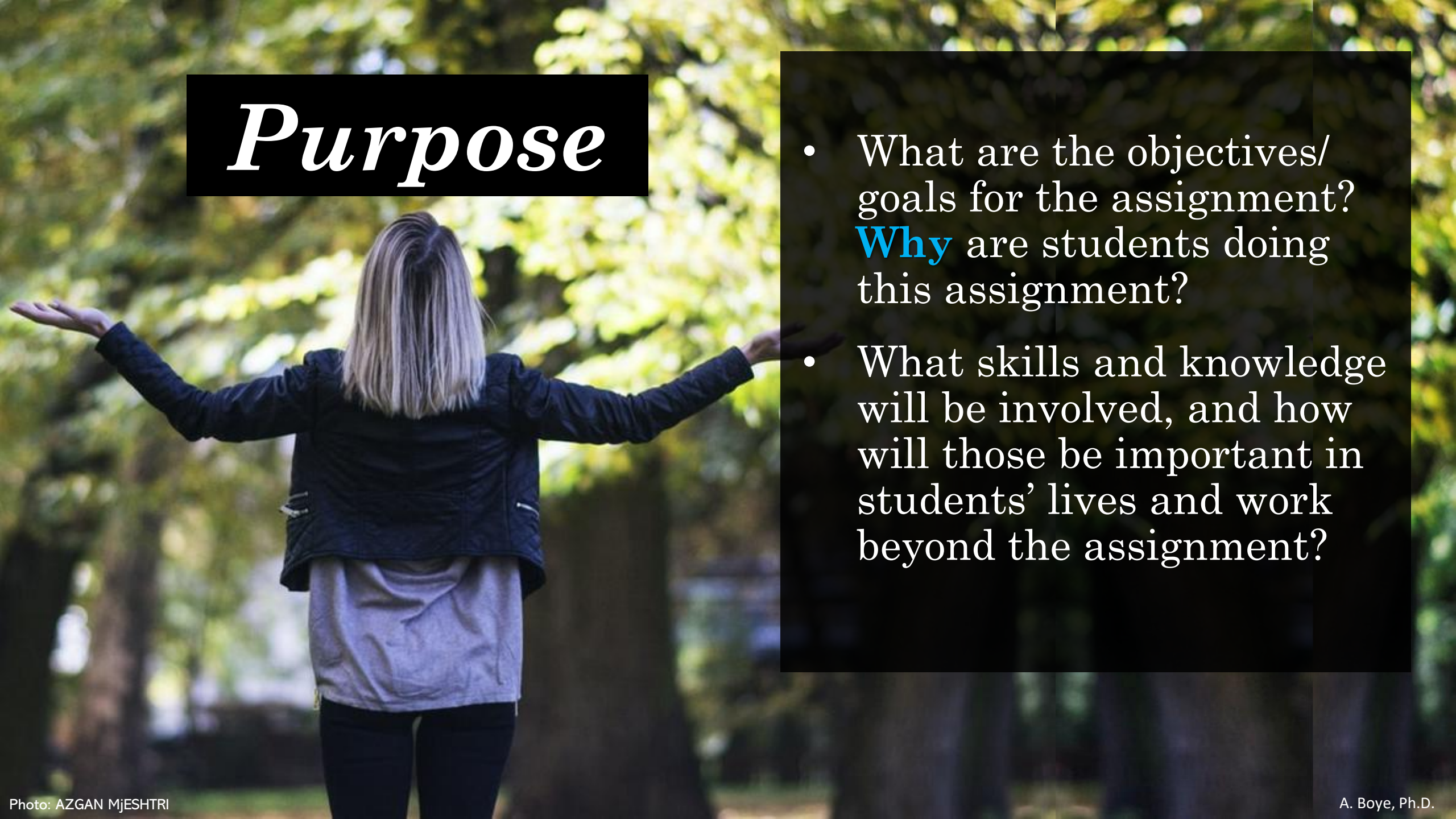
- **Enhances students' learning, across all disciplines** in important ways:
  - *Academic confidence*
  - *Sense of belonging*
  - *Skills valued by employers*
- **Improved performance**
- **Improved retention rates**
- Even greater impact for **underserved, underrepresented, and first-generation** students



Photo: RUT MIIT

A. Boye, Ph.D.

# PURPOSE
# TASK
# CRITERIA



# *Purpose*

- What are the objectives/ goals for the assignment? **Why** are students doing this assignment?
- What skills and knowledge will be involved, and how will those be important in students' lives and work beyond the assignment?

Photo: AZGAN MjESHTRI

A. Boye, Ph.D.

# *Task*

- **What** do students need to know/ do to complete the assignment?
- How should they complete the tasks/ steps?

Photo: Ray Fragapane

# Criteria

- What are the **characteristics** of a successful finished product?
- How will the assignment be assessed?



Photo: Nizzah Khusnunnisa

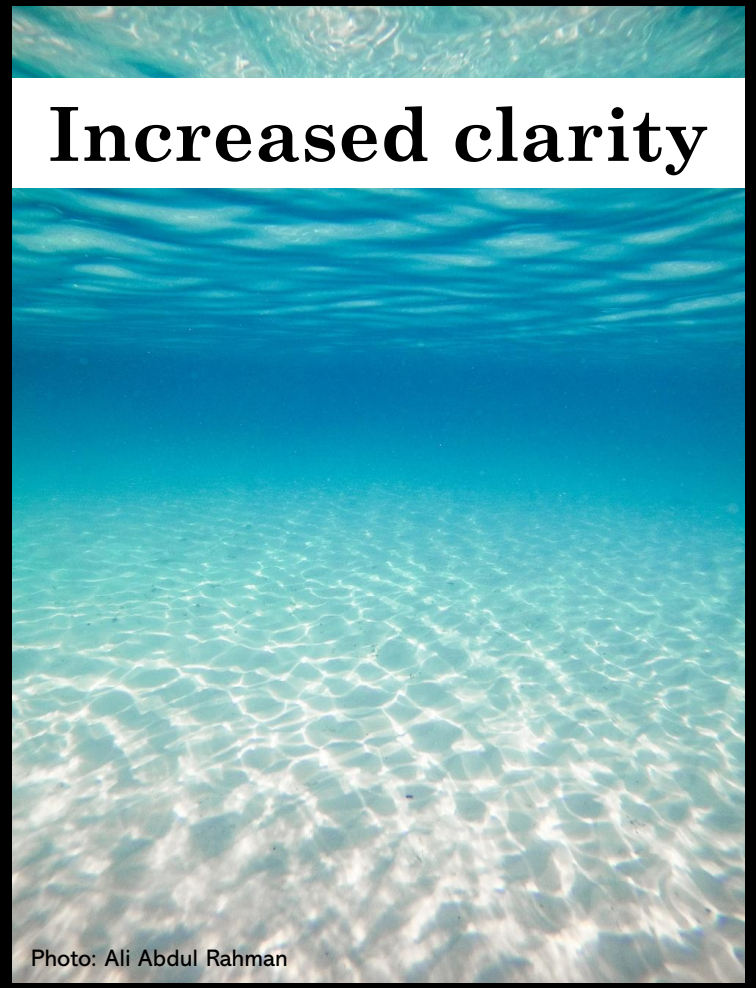
# *Transparency in action*

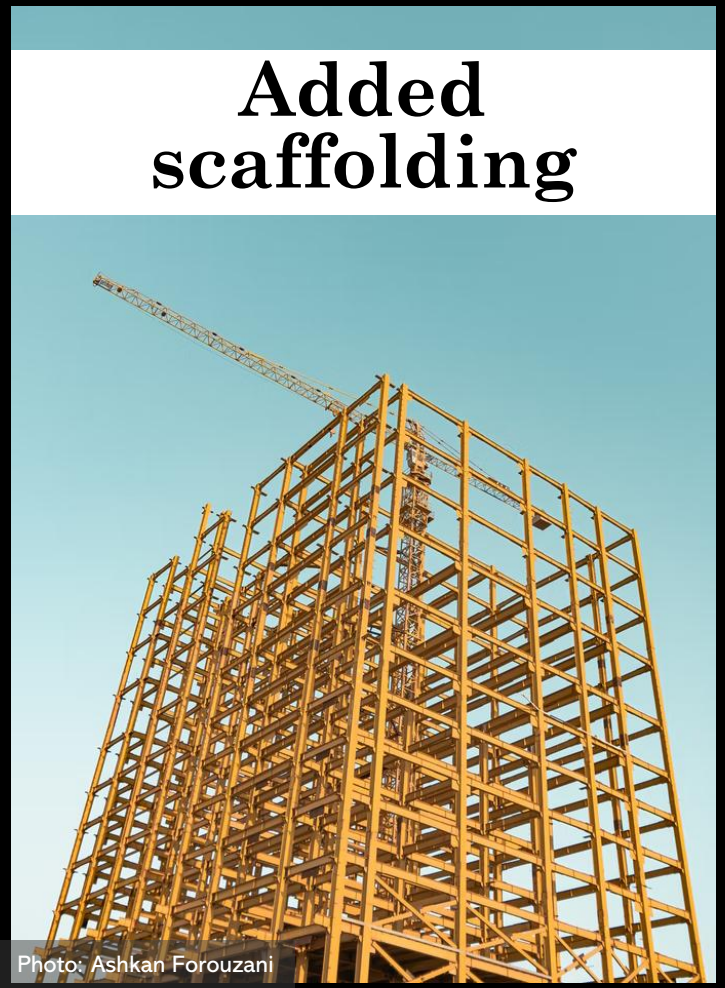
Read through and compare/contrast the provided "before and after" sample assignments, which were revised to improve transparency. Then consider the following :

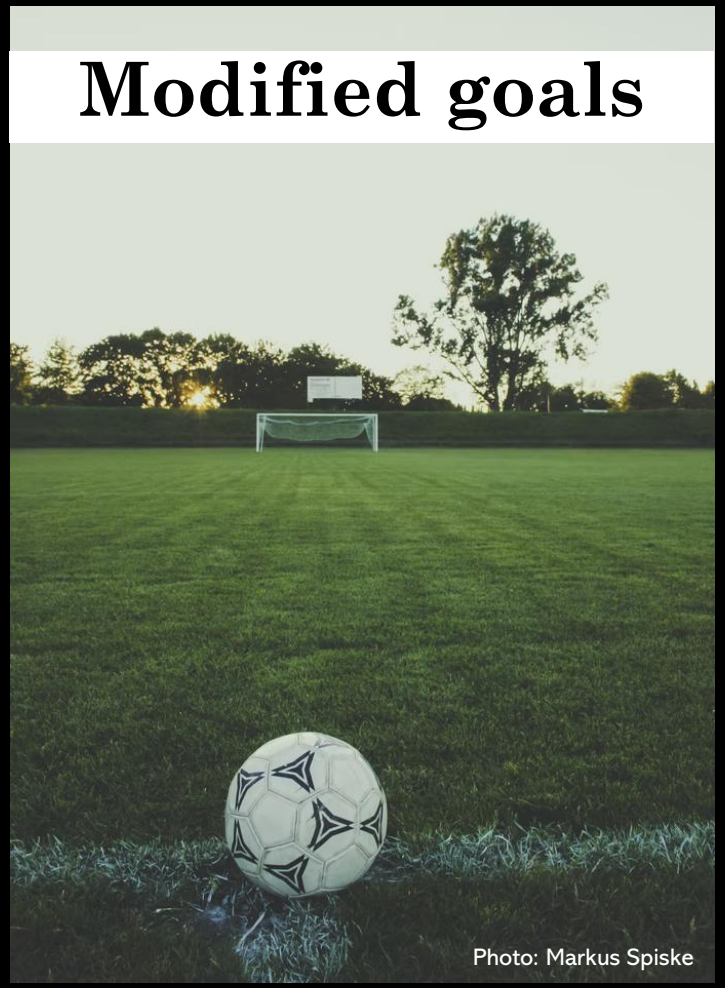
- *What was your initial gut reaction to each "before" assignment vs. each "after" assignment?*
- *What specific differences did you notice between the 2 versions of each assignment? What decisions did the instructors make?*
- *How do you think students might respond to the revisions?*

# *Reflections from other instructors*

# *What revisions did they make?*



# *What benefits did they observe?*

## Adopting students' perspectives



Photo: Nathan Dumlao

## Fostering self-reflection

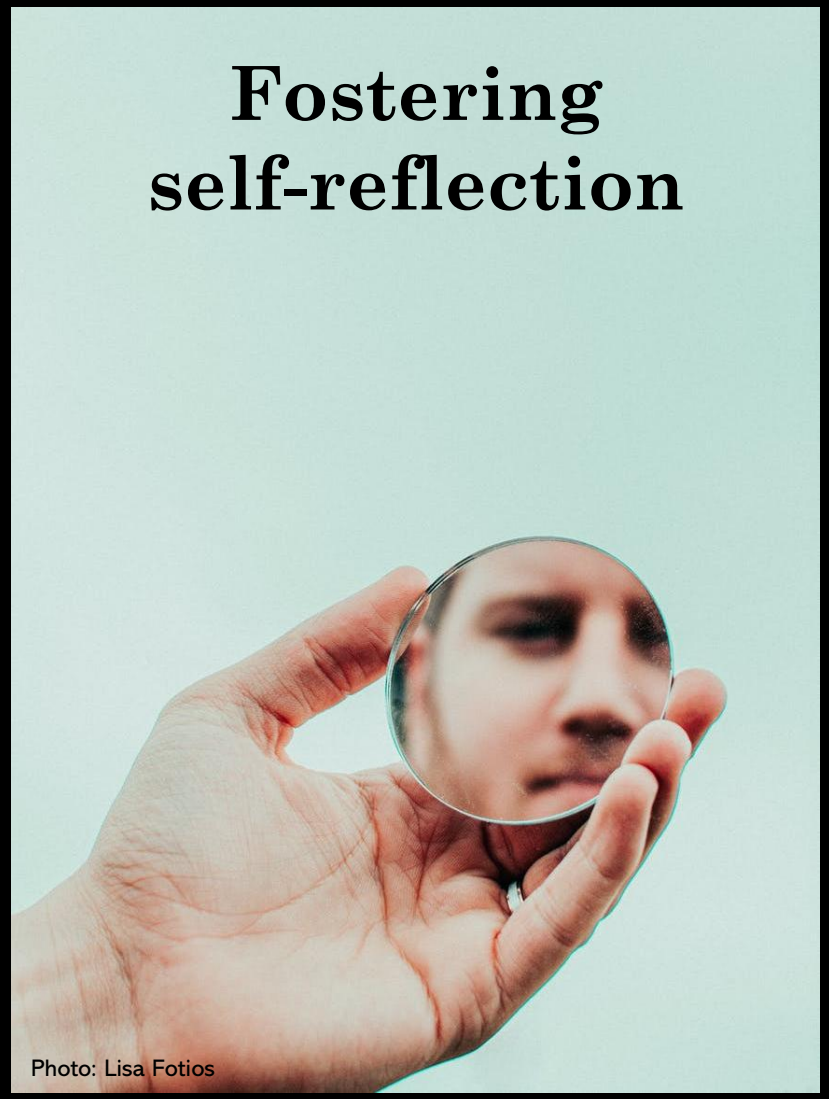


Photo: Lisa Fotios

## Cultivating time management



Photo: KoolShooters

# Improved student performance!



Photo: Jacob Bentzinger

"**Overall students performed much better** on the revised assignment. The quality of the finished work was higher, and there were fewer groups that missed the mark completely. In a class of 10-15 groups, I've found that 3-4 groups usually completely misunderstand the assignment and turn in something that doesn't meet the intent. The redesigned assignment had only one group in this category."

"Unquestionably, this freshmen class was **the most prepared and successful in the completion of the assigned technique**. Typically … several students would fail the midterm technique exam, primarily because they did not understand the expected level of mastery. … This resulted in students feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. Tears routinely would follow. After the implementation of the transparent design, the success rate of the students skyrocketed, many scoring 100%. **Not a single student failed, nor a single tear shed.**"

A. Boye, Ph.D.

# *Tips for implementation*

- Ask a "disciplinary stranger" to review
- Avoid the urge to provide *too many* skills or tasks!
- Spend time in class going over the assignment
- Provide examples of good work – and evaluate them together in class!

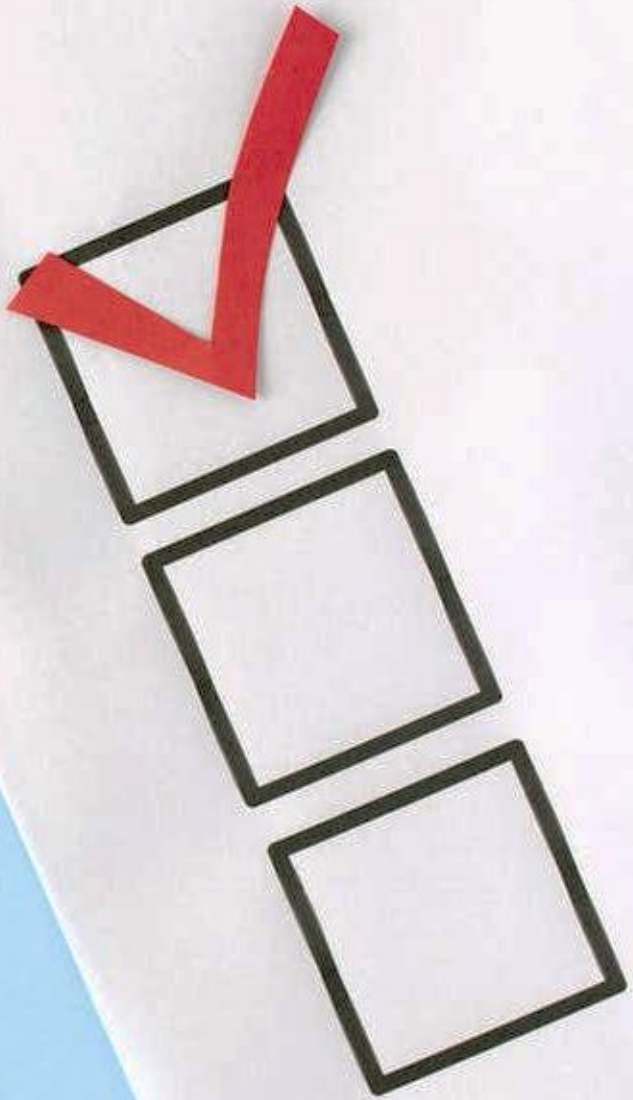




Photo: Tara Winstead

# *Questions? Consultations?*

## *Interested in a hands-on workshop?*

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