

Chapter 4

TILTING Assignments in In-Major Undergraduate Courses

Rod McRae

Middle Georgia State University, USA

Katherine B. Green

University of West Georgia, USA

Jamie Brandenburg

University of West Georgia, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter shares how the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) assignment design framework was investigated and implemented in face-to-face and fully online courses. After a brief introduction and literature review, the authors showcase two TILT empirical studies with undergraduate students. The two studies are shared in the form of vignette case studies. The first case study was an investigation and implementation of a TILT assignment in a fully online course. The authors will share the results from student surveys using the Transparency in Learning and Teaching Project survey. The second case study investigated student performance on a key assessment, prior to TILTING the directions and after the key assessment was TILTEd. Student results, as well as lessons learned and implications for college professors and administrators, are discussed. One component of the chapter describes faculty development on TILT-based assignments, along with perceptions of and benefits of implementing TILT in the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Course assignments that emphasize transparency by using the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) assignment design framework rely on a student-centered approach to instruction. The TILT framework prompts faculty to motivate and direct students through providing (1) what knowledge and skills students will learn and practice and for what reasons, (2) the specific steps students should complete while working on the assignment, and (3) the elements of the assignment through which students earn their points/grade. This three-phase format of a TILTed assignment, summarized as purpose, task, and criteria, shapes the assignment (re) design process and can lead to improvements of student outcomes (Winkelmes et al., 2016). Regardless of course modality, these three elements of a TILTed assignment remain the same, even though the methods by which faculty might choose to share and talk about the assignment could differ across modalities—and even disciplines.

This chapter explores the background of and literature supporting the application of the TILT assignment design framework, two distinct vignette case studies, and the perceptions and benefits to a range of student outcomes and to faculty workload as the result of implementing TILT in courses. The chapter also identifies connections between TILT-related outcomes and extant issues of equity in higher education.

BACKGROUND

Higher education in the United States of America continues to navigate the challenges associated with a long history of inequities in access and outcomes for students from historically underserved communities. Many colleges and universities are working to reduce the challenges for these students on campus; however, historically underserved, and underrepresented students continue to find that many institutions are becoming increasingly segregated by race and socioeconomic status (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2015; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Cahalan et al., 2021). Yet against this context of existing disparities, along with new ones, students from historically underserved communities are entering higher education institutions in larger numbers than in previous years (Grawe, 2018; Hussar & Bailey, 2018; Cahalan et al., 2021).

Entering college, though, does not guarantee the successful completion of a degree, especially when instructional practices that should foster student learning also function inadvertently as barriers to student achievement. Students from minority populations are more likely to disappear from rosters (Cahalan et al., 2021; Shapiro et al., 2018). These students also often enter college with many misconceptions about how to be successful in their courses (Gabriel, 2008; Habley et al., 2012;

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