



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## Portfolio Creation

Two years ago I was asked to institute a new program in computer drafting and design (CADD) at a community college. I am a licensed architect and have used CADD in my own work and taught it to a wide variety of students. I know and understand the creative power the computer brings to design professions.



My students learn how to draw with a computer by creating one drawing per week for most of the 10-week quarter, followed by a drawing project. I choose the drawing assignments carefully; they represent a ladder approach to learning the current software program. Each week's assigned drawing builds upon skills learned in previous weeks. So by demonstrating these drawing skills, students learn how to use AutoCAD, or whatever program I am teaching.

The weekly required drawing creates a fast-paced learning environment. It represents a big challenge, intended to build up to the academic *pièce de résistance*: the student's portfolio of work—a new vehicle for academic evaluation, far more valuable than a letter grade.

This portfolio, or book of drawings, is critical. I require that all course assignments and the project go into this graphic notebook; they should have professional appearance and style. The book of drawings does not have to be large (standard "A" folio size of 8 1/2 x 11 sheets from a Hewlett Packard Laserjet printer is fine), but it has to have a graphic presence. I recommend a title page with an individual logo or theme, possibly a table of contents. All work goes into plastic sheet protectors, and each student is required to purchase an appropriate hard-cover notebook to maintain the required style and appearance.

In the basic AutoCAD course, a three-quarter sequence covering the fundamentals of orthographic (two-dimensional) drawing, followed by courses in paraline theory and true perspective modeling (three-dimensional work), the student has the opportunity to create an impressive display of talents and abilities.



All of the drawing assignments, the project, and the portfolio receive letter grades. At this juncture, the

skeptic might wonder what all the fuss is about. If I am giving out conventional letter grades, why make such a big deal out of the portfolio?—because the graphic notebook is much more important to student success than any transcript grade.

In the design professions, future employers want to see what a potential employee can do. Can the student draw? Can the student produce on the computer? Can the student make a real contribution to the firm? The same questions hold true for my students going on to advanced degrees in the academic world.



Portfolio creation is highly applicable to the field of architecture; in fact, the creation of a portfolio of work can benefit most courses of study. In the sciences, laboratory and experimental work lend themselves to portfolio creation. The same applies to expository writing, or fiction, or poetry within the language arts. Research papers in any of the social sciences can be formally tied into a notebook of achievement.

A portfolio is simply a vehicle for demonstrating skills. As such, it is a "put-up-or-shut-up" chance that every student should take. There is nothing new or revolutionary about this procedure.

It gives students the opportunity to show what they can do. It shows them how to present and display their work. The grades they earn along the way mean little compared to that tangible end.

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## The Virtue of Group Papers

One of the challenges for instructors of American government courses is that some students feel estranged from their government and its politics. Confronting a class of jaded Americans can be painfully disheartening. I have a method for stimulating what the Greeks termed "political virtue," or the political efficacy necessary to operate in the civic arena with some sense of principled confidence.

The Greeks believed that civic activity engenders civic virtue, that citizens gained the virtue necessary to govern and to evaluate the workings of government, by way of political involvement. People excluded from civic activity could never hope to understand the virtuous course of action in any political situation.

If instructors of political science concur with these insights, and if they see civic virtue as more important to their students than memorizing terminology and academic concepts, they may find themselves involving their students less in listening to lectures and more in classroom activities. The group essay is an exacting exercise rewarded with a hard-earned grade and perhaps with some measure of political virtue.



In American government classes, students work in groups (of four or five) to write four essays.

- An assignment begins with the class role playing a political issue. In their first simulation, they imagine themselves the citizens of a fragile new country in need of a more centralized political system, and they construct a constitution for their country. In their second activity, they debate liberal, centrist, and conservative values. In their third activity, they work with the dilemmas faced by the Jewish majority in Skokie (IL), when the tiny American Nazi Party insisted on demonstrating. In their last simulation, the students confront America's national debt, posturing as interest group bureaucrats demanding public resources and as congressional representatives attempting to balance those interests within budgetary constraints.

- After each simulation, the students receive a worksheet with questions to answer outside of class: what did they learn; what was the most important lesson; why did they do what they did; how did they feel; would they do anything differently if they had a second chance; how does the textbook tie in; how did they formulate their answers? The completed

worksheets are brought to class, and the students are assigned to a writing group. Each group must work together to merge its individual ideas into a single formal essay addressing the questions on the worksheets.

- Typed papers are submitted; each student attaches an individual handwritten worksheet, informing the instructor of his/her initial contributions. On the cover sheet, the students also grade individual group members on participation. Each student grade is averaged and the instructor's grade is averaged in with the total grade given to each by the group. Student input on the grade keeps everyone focused and working during the writing process.



Most students are enthusiastic about their group assignments—they attend regularly and work hard on their papers. Most importantly, they leave the class with political lessons not soon forgotten. Of course, I still lecture, and the students still take tests over their textbook material. But, it seems obvious that the most meaningful instruction in this class, for example, concerns less the memorizing of the process by which bills pass the U.S. House of Representatives than what it means to defend one's political values before one's peers. There is much to be gained from stimulating political virtue in alienated, skeptical, "apolitical" Americans.

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