

An active and creative approach to learning: tangible/alternative projects encourage student success

Tangible/alternative projects in literature-based courses help students understand difficult subject matter more thoroughly and from a different perspective. Tangible/alternative projects (TAPs) are hand-constructed, physical representations of researched material that reflect the time period and literature being studied. TAPs facilitate a creative learning experience through alternative, hands-on approaches to research and support innovative teaching practices in the application of a more thorough, active learning model. Examples of TAPs include, but are not limited to, paintings made with homemade paint, period-accurate representations of weaponry, hand-sewn clothing, and handmade chainmail armor.

While a hands-on approach is not the traditional route in humanities courses, TAPs foster a growth mindset and offer students the opportunity to take an active and creative approach to their educations. Growth mindset helps students make the transition from focusing on grades to focusing on the learning process, thereby deepening their understanding of the subject at hand. TAPs allow students to engage in different research methods and develop skills that translate into real-world experience. For example, a student interested in Medieval clothing might research different hand-stitching techniques. In starting and completing a garment, the student experiences first-hand the effort it takes to make fine clothing and learns about the importance of the Medieval working-class. Approaching research through a creative outlet provides students the opportunity to strengthen analytical and problem-solving skills while developing an understanding and appreciation for the time period being studied.

Incorporating TAPs into a traditional curriculum aligns with University System of Georgia's Complete College Georgia initiative to restructure instructional delivery by "improving the quality of student learning through effective teaching, facilitation and innovative modes of learning." TAPs improve on traditional education practices by embracing a creative approach to research. Allowing students to pursue individual interests in a classroom setting gives students more control over the way they learn. This individualized approach creates a positive learning environment and encourages student success. Our poster presentation includes pictures of completed TAPs and presents the correlation among TAPs, growth mindset and student success using engaging images and text.

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