A Culture of Assessment

INSIDE HIGHER ED

Sponsored By:

ETS Major Field Tests

Committing to a Culture of Reflection, Analysis and Improvement

At ETS, we believe in the life-changing power of learning. In 1947 our founders recognized the need for an independent, nonprofit organization devoted to educational research and assessment to expand opportunities for learners of all income and social status levels. Throughout its history, ETS has been driven by a vision of what's possible when all people can improve their lives through education. Learning is at the core of our mission — and we believe research and assessment have valuable roles to play in ensuring that all learners have ample opportunity to achieve their educational, career and life goals.

For more than 25 years, ETS has focused on helping higher education institutions and programs measure student learning outcomes to evaluate program performance and satisfy accreditation requirements. We've worked closely with colleges and universities to provide evidence of learning to a variety of external stakeholders including accrediting bodies, students and their families, policymakers at the state and federal level, the public and employers. And while ETS continues to be fully committed to this effort, we recognize this is an unprecedented time in higher education; therefore, we are working to meet the challenges of an uncertain future.

Our institutional partners face daunting challenges such as limited human resources, budget restrictions, enrollment and retention concerns, and a general sense of "what now?" — leaving many saying, "something's got to give." And for some programs and institutions, the assessment of learning outcomes has been deemed disposable. Instead, I'd like to propose the following food for thought: during these times of uncertainty and change, a deep-seated commitment to a culture of assessment matters even more than before.

As you read through this collection of articles that focus on the importance of establishing, nurturing and promoting a culture of assessment on your campus, I encourage you to consider the degree to which your own institution practices continuous improvement as an ongoing process of discovery. Thoughtful reflection and analysis based on valid, reliable data provides educators and stakeholders with a way to make decisions that build on learner strengths and opportunities. When institutions and programs use theory and research to inform practice and policy, they set the course for continuous improvement and long-term success for both programs and learners. What does this currently look like on your campus?

At ETS, we feel fortunate to be on this journey with you, creating a world where all people can discover what's possible through education. We will continue to support institutions by providing evidence-centered assessments to demonstrate student learning and program effectiveness. In collaboration with *Inside Higher Ed*, we're pleased to bring you information that will help you meet the unprecedented demands of today's higher education landscape.

Regards,
Alberto Acereda
Executive Director, Global Higher Education Division
ETS

Introduction

Assessment has become a crucial part of American higher education. As accreditors and the state and federal government require colleges to assess student learning, it has become the norm.

But being required to assess students is not the same thing as when colleges come to truly believe in the process. At its best, assessment is being used to reward colleges, to help colleges improve their services and to differentiate among institutions. And assessment, when done right, provides feedback to instructors and students on how they are doing.

The articles in this compilation explore the way colleges are conducting assessment, and pushing for better results. *Inside Higher Ed* will continue to cover assessment. We welcome your suggestions for future stories.

–The Editors
editor@insidehighered.com

DEMONSTRATE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND STRENGTHEN YOUR CONTINUOUS CYCLE OF IMPROVEMENT

The education landscape is constantly changing and the ability to know what in your program needs attention is crucial. The *ETS*® Major Field Tests are comprehensive, high-quality undergraduate and MBA outcomes assessments expertly designed to measure the critical knowledge and understanding that students acquire in their major field of study.

The ETS Major Field Tests help you recognize the areas of your program that are working well and where there are weaknesses, leading to a cycle of continuous improvement that furthers student learning outcomes and program strength.

The ETS Major Field Tests are available in more than a dozen disciplines:

BUSINESS
- Associate Degree in Business
- Bachelor's Degree in Business
- Master of Business Administration (MBA)

STEM
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Computer Science
- Mathematics
- Physics

SOCIAL SCIENCES
- Criminal Justice
- Economics
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Sociology

HUMANITIES
- Literature in English
- Music

Features of the ETS Major Field Tests include:

- Easy to Administer and Use
- Flexible to Suit Your Needs
- Customizable Content
- Data to Prove Your Program Efficacy
- Data to Measure Improvements Over Time
- Highest Quality Design Standards
- Support and Guidance

Learn more at www.ets.org/mft

ETS® Major Field Tests

NEWS

How Can State Funding Models Incentivize Equity?

A better set of outcomes-based state funding metrics can encourage institutions to focus on low-income and minority students' success, a new report argues.

By Emma Whitford // April 2, 2021

Funding public colleges and universities based on outcome or performance metrics has its share of critics who think the policies are ineffective or harmful – especially for institutions that serve a large number of minority and low-income students. But experts at one equity-focused think tank say outcome-based funding models are worth trying to redeem.

More than 30 states currently use outcome- or performance-based funding models to tie at least some public higher education funding to institutional performance metrics like enrollment, retention and graduation rates. Years of research have shown that these models often fail to achieve their goals. A recent report looking at two decades' worth of performance-based funding model studies revealed that most models result in null or modest improvements to institutional outcomes. A pair of academic research papers published in 2017 found that outcomes-based funding models result in a slew of unintended consequences, including that minority-serving institutions lose significant funding compared with other institutions.

These criticisms are warranted, said Kayla Elliott, who is assistant director for higher education policy at the Education Trust and the lead author of a new report on outcome-based funding models titled "Re-Imagining Outcomes-Based Funding."

COLLEGIATE IMAGES/CONTRIBUTOR/GETTY IMAGES

Students walk across the University of Cincinnati campus. Ohio ties most of its higher education funding for public colleges and universities to outcomes-based metrics.

The report argues that through better design and implementation, outcomes-based funding can equip states and institutions with the tools and accountability systems necessary to improve equitable outcomes in public higher education.

"Outcomes-based funding offers an opportunity to address equity in targeted ways that haven't been done before, with strategies that are based largely on enrollment," Elliott said. "OBF offers an opportunity to really focus in and target resources to the institutions that are serving students of color and students of low-income backgrounds."

The report identifies five key metrics already included in some states' funding models that could be adopted more broadly to build better models across the country: enrollment of students of color, enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds, success of students of color, success of low-income students and campus racial climate.

The enrollment and success metrics are fairly straightforward and can be easily quantified. For example, institutions can count the number of students of color enrolled in a specific program, or the number of low-income students who receive a degree each year.

Some states incentivize enrollment of students from specific ethnic or racial backgrounds. Wisconsin's outcome-based funding system for four-year institutions prioritizes enrolling students of Southeast Asian descent, while Montana prioritizes Native American students, and Hawaii prioritizes Native Hawaiian students.

Fewer states have metrics related to race than to income status. There are a few reasons for this, but Elliott pointed to affirmative action bans as one complication.

"We can't discount the role of affirmative action bans in the nine states that have them," Elliott said. "We know that our partners in the work in California have named Proposition 209 as the hurdle that they couldn't cross to get race implemented in their outcomes-based funding policy for two-year institutions."

Proposition 209 is a California constitutional amendment that says the state cannot discriminate against or grant preferential treatment on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin in public employment, education or contracting. The proposition effectively banned affirmative action in the state. The proposition was passed in 1996, and California voters turned down an effort to repeal the measure in November.

Very few states have metrics to measure campus racial climate. To evaluate which state metrics fell into the campus racial climate category, Elliott and her co-authors looked for states that incentivized campus climate surveys, faculty and staff diversity, and a number of other metrics.

Rhode Island and Pennsylvania assess campus racial climate by measuring faculty diversity, but only Rhode Island's metric is mandatory. Kansas and Tennessee are the only other states with metrics related to campus racial climate.

Despite their scarcity, these metrics are important, Elliott said. Institutions should be required to improve equity throughout a student's education, not only at the beginning and end.

"I think states have a responsibility to hold institutions accountable not just for what happens at entry and exit, or enrollment and completion, but also the experiences that students have while they're on campus and while they're actively enrolled and taking courses," Elliott said.

She suggested that states could also hold institutions accountable for the number of hate or bias crimes, assaults or other incidents reported on campus, based on Clery Act criteria. The Clery Act requires colleges and universities that participate in federal financial aid programs to disclose information about crime on their campuses. States could also evaluate colleges based on the number of courses and academic centers dedicated to the study of Black or Chicano history and issues, or the existence of extracurricular groups and student centers that support students of color.

To improve states' funding models, the Education Trust report lists 10 steps for model design and five steps for implementation. One of the most important steps is making the metrics mandatory, Elliott said.

"It is absolutely imperative that states make equity metrics mandatory, that states make those metrics that involve enrollment and success of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds a mandatory and integral part of the outcomes-based funding system," Elliott said.

It's also essential to tie enough public higher education funding to outcomes-based funding formulas so that institutions are incentivized to meet the metrics, the report argues.

Tennessee and Ohio tie most of their higher education funding to outcomes-based metrics. In Illinois, the funding tied to outcomes-based metrics is far from large enough to motivate many institutions. More than half of higher education institutions in Illinois received less than $10,000 in outcomes-based funding in 2019, and three institutions received less than $1,000.

The report also encourages states to reward institutions for incremental progress instead of an all-or-nothing system that can result in steep one-year funding declines.

"OBF policies should avoid harmful tactics that prevent institutions from being rewarded for incremental growth, such as absolute rankings, which unfairly pit institutions against one another; one-size-fits-all metrics, which ignore institutional demographics and resources; and punitive practices like rescinding an institution's recurring funds," the report said. ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/04/02/how-can-outcomes-based-funding-colleges-promote-equity

Find out how you can overcome assessment challenges.

Assessing students in educational settings can be tricky, but when assessment processes are implemented well, they can help give your program a voice and unlock a cycle of continuous improvement.

Read *Top Four Assessment Challenges in Higher Education* to learn about common assessment challenges and how to overcome them.

Visit ets.org/voice

ETS® Major Field Tests

When Is a Learning Community Not a Learning Community?

A leading educator asserts that some colleges use the "high-impact" educational practices in name only – and a group of learning community advocates largely agrees. What's their plan?

By Doug Lederman // March 4, 2020

If you're a fan of learning communities – a "high-impact" educational practice that more and more colleges and universities are adopting – Steve Mintz's blog post on the subject on *Inside Higher Ed* late last year could have felt like a punch in the gut.

The essay, headlined "The Truth About Learning Communities," mostly explored the various approaches colleges and universities take to learning communities, an increasingly popular student success strategy. The approach engages groups of (typically) first-year students in a set of educational and co-curricular experiences (and sometimes living arrangements) around a common theme, question or career goal.

But in addition to laying out the learning communities landscape, Mintz's essay opened and closed with the warning: calling something a rose doesn't make it one.

His conclusion said:

Learning communities speak to our highest aspirations: to make higher education less transactional and more developmental, supportive, integrative and holistic. But we mustn't let our language obscure reality. Much as the Holy Roman Empire was (in Voltaire's words) neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire, we mustn't call a weed a rose.

One could read that last sentence to suggest that Mintz, a nationally known cultural historian with a bent for curricular innovation, thinks learning communities are a fad or, worse, a fraud.

His comments definitely got the attention of the academics in what we might call the learning community community – but they on the whole read Mintz's essay as a caution and a challenge, not an insult.

“The range of [learning community] exposure, experience and outcomes suggests, as Steve Mintz called out in the recent IHE article … that we need to assure that LCs are sufficiently resourced, sustainable, and working to achieve our highest aspirations,” a group of researchers and educators calling itself the Learning Community Collaborative said in a statement about their work.

Or, as one member of the collaborative put it in an interview last week: bad learning communities "do more harm than good … so how do we ensure that what campuses are doing are truly learning communities?"

Learning communities – the concept and the phrase – have been around in one form or another for a long time, so in some ways 2020 seems a little late for a discussion about what they are, how many campuses have them and the like.

But like many things in higher education, it's arguably only in the last decade-plus that learning communities – like some of the other "high-impact practices" that George Kuh and other researchers on student learning have documented – have moved into the mainstream. And it's a similarly recent phenomenon that colleges and universities are facing intensifying pressure to ensure that as many students as possible succeed to the fullest extent possible, and to shrink if not eliminate gaps in attainment by different racial and socioeconomic groups.

In response to the push for "student success," many colleges are adopting strategy after strategy, tactic after tactic, to both try to improve their students' actual success and, Mintz says, to show, to signal, that they are trying.

Mintz does not doubt that many of the institutions implementing learning communities are doing so with that first purpose in mind – helping students.

Learning communities do that, he writes, by "connecting students with peers and making the first-year curriculum more coherent, cohesive, synergistic and relevant to students’ interests and aspirations." Done right, they must be more than clusters of linked classes; the involved faculty members must work together to create an "integrated educational experience," collaborating on "defining learning outcomes, selecting content and readings, and designing assignments and assessments."

Some of the elements are especially important for first-generation and other less experienced students, Mintz says. Putting students into a cohort and into study groups is important because "many first-generation students believe in a pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps, I-can-do-it-myself mode," but for many such students, "that's a recipe for failure."

Steve Mintz

Linking a group of courses together so students see the connections between them helps "create a more integrated intellectual experience" that gives students "academic momentum," and it's essential to build in co-curricular activities "apart from the academic if [students] are going to have any degree of mental health."

Falling Short

Some institutions, though, take shortcuts, Mintz says in an interview, "assigning students to five classes and declar[ing] it has some theme, but they're the same classes that existed in the past." For others it's an administrative convenience, "not a community in any sense at all, with the professors never consulted at all about common projects or themes, and there's no intentional design, no leader."

“Often you’re marketing to accreditors, to peer institutions – ‘we have learning communities,’” he says.

Mintz, who is spending this year at the City University of New York's Hunter College as senior adviser to the president for student success and special initiatives, is careful to say that he doesn't want to "pit perfection against the possible."

"People can only do what their institutions can do," he says. There's a reason, Mintz adds, that "no university since 1945 has adopted Columbia [University's] core" curriculum, which requires the kinds of faculty, staff and other resources that only places like Columbia and the University of Chicago can afford.

And even an imperfect, less-than-ideal learning community may well be "better than what those students were getting before," Mintz says, as any "more structured first-year experience is going to make them better off."

But learning communities that are a "charade" benefit no one, he writes.

Rita Sperry bristled the first time she read Mintz's blog post on *Inside Higher Ed*. "I saw it as a little bit of an indictment of what we do," says Sperry, associate dean of University College and coordinator of the first-year learning communities program at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi.

But as she re-read and discussed it with colleagues (including those in the Learning Community Collaborative), she says, "We realized he's saying a lot of the same things we feel. There are programs out there that call themselves learning communities that are learning communities in name only.

"So now we're using it as a challenge for our faculty and myself, to make sure that we're not a learning community in name only."

> "We realized he's saying a lot of the same things we feel. There are programs out there that call themselves learning communities that are learning communities in name only."

Texas A&M Corpus Christi, a Hispanic-serving institution where a majority of students are first-generation college goers, requires all of its students to participate in a curriculum-based (as opposed to residential) learning community of their choice in their first two semesters. All of the learning communities include a first-year seminar and at least one other course, with instructors for the courses meeting regularly to coordinate their teaching plans and integrate their assignments.

Sperry is confident that the 25-year-old program successfully integrates learning for participating students. "It's helping students pull together the things they're learning," she says.

But "some people at our institution feel it's just a fad," Sperry says. "Others don't know if it's worth the effort." And she acknowledges that it's hard to judge the program's impact because its required nature means there's no control group of Corpus Christi students who aren't in a learning community.

That's why Sperry got involved in the Learning Community Collaborative, which describes its mission as "defining the features of learning communities that have the most impact on student success and … mak[ing] a united recommendation that all learning community faculty/staff should be aspiring to integrate these elements into their learning community programs."

"I feel like we do need to do a lot more research on learning communities and the qualities that make them successful," she says. Having that body of work might satisfy the doubters on her campus – some of whose concerns were captured in Mintz's blog post.

Richie Gebauer is executive director for the first-year experience and student transitions at Cabrini University, in Pennsylvania, and president of the Learning Communities Association, which was founded in 2017.

He shares Mintz's worry that "a lot of institutions are trying to develop and offer these opportunities to be competitive in the marketplace, but whether or not they have true impactfulness, I'm not sure that's the case," he says. Colleges have "flooded the market" with programs they call learning communities, but some of the programs are "diluted" – they don't intentionally integrate the courses and the instructors who teach them, have a clear leader, etc.

Can that harm students? Is participation in a lesser learning community – a diluted one, to use Gebauer's word – worse than being in none at all?

"No, I think there's probably some type of positive impact there," he says. "I don't know if it's measurable, but based on the fact you have a group of peers working together in some capacity, there's probably some impact, though it may be minimal."

The bigger fear, he says, is that "when learning communities that are diluted, that aren't having the sort of profound impact that we feel, and that research shows, truly integrative learning communities are having, it hurts institutions that are doing more integrative type of work and contributes to the idea that they're a fad."

That's why aligning the wide range of experts and leaders of the "siloed" groups that focus on learning communities into one common organization makes sense, Gebauer, Sperry and others in the Learning Community Collaborative say.

"We're trying in an informal way to establish a standard for what these learning communities should look like, what type of effort and time and energy needs to be put into them to make them substantial, and what's really impactful," Gebauer says.

Gebauer insists that the effort to define a standard is "not about excluding programs that are saying they're doing learning communities but are not truly integrative."

"It's about giving institutions the information they need to strive for," he adds. "We'll want them to say, 'If we're missing these elements, these characteristics, how do we think we might develop and design those?' "

Shockingly, nobody I spoke to for this article acknowledged having the sort of "lesser than" learning community that Mintz called out. (Gebauer laughed when I asked him if there's an association of "diluted" learning community programs.)

But they're clearly out there. Gebauer recalled a learning community workshop a few years ago where he and some colleagues pointed out to officials of one college that their learning community appeared to be mainly a way to house students rather than to actually give them an integrative, connective learning experience.

Statement From the LC Collaborative

In light of the fact that over ten years have passed since George Kuh (2008) introduced research supporting the significant impact of specific educational practices - high-impact practices (HIPs) - on student success, it seems critical to evaluate the evolution and progress of one specific HIP, learning communities. Over the past few months, learning community (LC) practitioners and researchers (names listed below) representing a multitude of organizations whose efforts are directly related or contribute to advocacy of and/or research/scholarship within learning communities theory and practice have been engaging in ongoing dialogue to explore the current state and future direction of learning communities. The organizations represented in these discussions include the Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education, the Learning Communities Association (LCA), the ACUHO-I Academic Initiatives Conference, the National Learning Community Consortium (NLCC), the Residential College Society (RCS), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the National Resource Center on the First-Year Experience and Students In Transition (NRC).

LCs have positively contributed to institutional efforts to expand integrative learning outcomes, tighten connections among students, increase student persistence, and foster a stronger sense of belonging. Living Learning Communities in particular have strengthened the beneficial integration of academic and residential experiences. Yet, as we see in annual NSSE results, LC participation is relatively rare for students. In fact only about 15% of first-year students report participating in LCs where groups of students take two or more classes together. While this percentage may under-represent the range of LCs in undergraduate education, particularly those that are purely residential, it signals a need for better counts. Even more, the range of LC exposure, experience and outcomes suggests as Steve Mintz called out in the recent IHE article (December 11, 2019) "The Truth About Learning Communities", that we need to assure that LCs are sufficiently resourced, sustainable, and working to achieve our highest aspirations to make higher education more supportive, integrative and holistic.

As this conversation has unfolded, this "collaborative" has recognized the importance of defining the features of learning communities that have the most impact on student success and hopes to make a united recommendation that all learning community faculty/staff should be aspiring to integrate these elements into their learning community programs. Such a recommendation would serve as a direct response to Mintz's recent article. Our development of a framework will help learning community programs, of all varieties, identify how they "fit" into this framework. From here our intention is to begin to respond to Jean Henscheid's November 2015 charge in the Learning Communities Research & Practice journal to count learning communities, more specifically determining just how many, and what type, of learning communities exist at colleges and universities in the United States.

Mimi Benjamin, PhD - Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Richie Gebauer, EdD - Cabrini University
Jeff Godowski, MEd - Cornell University
Janine Graziano, PhD - Kingsborough Community College
Jean M. Henscheid, PhD - University of South Carolina
Jillian Kinzie, PhD - Indiana University, National Survey of Student Engagement
Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas, PhD - University of Virginia
Shannon Lundeen, PhD - Elon University
Jody Jessup-Anger, PhD - Marquette University
Julia Metzker, PhD - Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education
Rita Sperry, PhD - Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

"It was really hard for them to hear, and the team leader pushed back hard and let us have it," he says. "But after letting it sink in, she came back and said, 'You're right.' They're now doing some really great work and have a clear understanding of where they're going."

He adds, "If we do this right, we'll help everyone raise the bar, and the work nationally just improves."

Nothing would make Steve Mintz happier. ■

> "It's about giving institutions the information they need to strive for. We'll want them to say, 'If we're missing these elements, these characteristics, how do we think we might develop and design those?"

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/03/04/friendly-critic-wonders-are-learning-communities-are-communities

Even 'Valid' Student Evaluations Are 'Unfair'

New study says student evaluations of teaching are still deeply flawed measures of teaching effectiveness, even when we assume they are unbiased and reliable.

By Colleen Flaherty // February 27, 2020

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Student evaluations of teaching reflect students' biases and are otherwise unreliable. So goes much of criticism of these evaluations, or SETs. Increasingly, research backs up both of those concerns.

On the other side of the debate, SET proponents acknowledge that these evaluations are imperfect indicators of teaching quality. Still, proponents argue that well-designed SETs inevitably tell us something valuable about students' learning experiences with a given professor.

A new study – which one expert called a possible "game-changer" – seeks to cut through the noise by assuming the best of SETs – at least, that which is supported by the existing literature. Its analysis assumes that the scores students give instructors are moderately correlated with student learning and the use of pedagogical best practices. It assumes that SETs are highly reliable, or that professors consistently get the same ratings. And it assumes that SETs do not systematically discriminate against instructors on the basis of irrelevant criteria such as their gender, class size and type of course being taught.

And even when stacking the deck for SETs, the study finds that these evaluations are deeply flawed measures of teaching quality.

New Question, Familiar Answer

"Unbiased, Reliable and Valid Student Evaluations Can Still Be Unfair," published in *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, was written by Justin Esarey and Natalie Valdes. Esarey, an associate professor, and Valdes, an undergraduate research fellow, both work in political science at Wake Forest University. They note – rightly – that their field has faced concerns about gender bias, including in student evaluations of female professors.

The problem transcends political science, of course, and many studies suggest that students perceive instructors differently based on factors beyond gender, such as race. (Political scientists Mirya Hollman, Ellen Key and Rebecca Kreitzer maintain a bibliography of relevant studies here.)

As the paper notes, "Using invalid, unreliable or biased student evaluations to make decisions about hiring and tenure is obviously harmful to students and faculty alike." Even worse, it says, "biased SETs could disadvantage faculty from underrepresented minority groups or punish faculty members who teach unpopular required courses."

While these are "important problems," the authors write, they shift gears and "ask a different question: if SETs are valid, reliable, and unbiased, what then?" Are SET scores without "demonstrable bias and moderately correlated with instructor quality a fair basis on which to judge a faculty member’s teaching performance?” If the answer to the latter question is no, then “there is a much bigger problem with the use of SETs than is commonly recognized.”

And no is indeed the answer: even under “ideal” circumstances, Esarey and Valdes write, SETs still yield an “unacceptably high error rate.”

Summing up his findings this week, Esarey said that unless the correlation between student ratings and teaching quality is “far, far stronger than even the most optimistic empirical research can support,” then common administrative uses of SETs “very frequently lead to incorrect decisions.” Those professors with the very highest evaluations “are often poor teachers,” he added, “and those with the very lowest evaluations are often better than the typical instructor.”

Consequently, Esarey said that he and Valdes would expect “any administrative decisions made using SET scores as the primary basis for judgment to be quite unfair.”

Experts in this area have long advised against basing high-stakes personnel decisions on student ratings of instruction alone. A number of institutions and professional groups have made commitments and policy changes to this effect. But SETs still have a major foothold in these processes on many campuses, as they are relatively easy and inexpensive compared to other means of assessing teaching quality. And because institutions invest relatively little time and few resources in their adjunct faculty members, these professors are disproportionately hired and fired based on student feedback.

Benefit of the Doubt

The current study is based on a computational simulation – no actual professors were involved (or harmed). That allowed Esarey and Valdes to directly measure teaching effectiveness, which is still very hard to measure in real life. For the same reason, Esarey and Valdes were also able to assess how accurate are administrative decisions using SET scores to gauge teaching effectiveness.

As Esarey explained, “In our simulation, we know a faculty member's SET score and also their real teaching effectiveness. We computationally simulate thousands of faculty members and then compare them to one another the way that a department chair or dean might evaluate faculty members using SET scores in real life.”

A bit more technically, the complex computer model simulated one million instructors' student ratings along with their teaching quality percentiles, with varying correlation between the two measures. Then it used the simulated scores in realistic evaluation scenarios. First, Esarey and Valdes looked at “pairwise comparisons” of sets of hypothetical faculty members via SET scores. This mirrored “comparison of job candidates on the basis of their teaching performance or the comparison of a faculty member up for tenure to the teaching record of a recent (un)successful case,” according to the study.

Next, Esarey and Valdes compared an individual professor’s SET scores to the overall population of SET scores from all faculty members in the model. That, in turn, mirrored a procedure “where faculty members who are under-performing relative to their peers (e.g. whose scores are below a certain percentile ranking) are identified for administrative action as part of a tenure case or other systematic review,” the study says.

In so doing, the researchers found that even when the correlation between instructor ratings and faculty instructional quality or student learning is as significant as it's ever been shown to be (about 0.43, based on a 1981 metastudy that has since been challenged), there remains a large difference in SET scores – as much as 30 percentage points. This does not reliably identify the best teacher in the pairwise comparison.

Moreover, one-quarter of these simulated faculty members with SET scores at or below the 20th percentile in the peer comparison analysis “are actually better at teaching than the median faculty member in our simulation.”

Even those with exceptionally high SET scores can be “poor teachers,” the study says, as nearly 19 percent of those with SET scores above the 95th percentile are no better than the median professor at teaching.

Making “fair, accurate personnel decisions based on faculty instruction requires a measure of teaching performance that is substantially more related to student learning or instructional best practices than SET scores alone," the study says. (The researchers confirmed their findings in a second, more advanced analysis.)

As for how SETs should be used within colleges and universities, the researchers make three recommendations. On a technical level, they advise removing any systematic gap in SET scores explained by noninstructional factors, such as gender, via regression adjustment or matched subsample analysis "before using these scores for any purpose."

How to Use SETs

This kind of adjustment can't "filter" out all idiosyncratic influences on SET scores, however, they say. They thus advise using a "combination of independent evaluators, interviews with students, teaching observations by experts, peer review of instructional materials and SET scores" to give "a much more accurate picture of a faculty member's teaching proficiency when SET scores alone would be misleading."

Averaging these multiple forms of evaluation can allow idiosyncratic variation in each one to cancel out, "resulting in further reduction of imprecision between the averaged assessment and a faculty member's true teaching performance," the study says.

Because this kind of multifaceted assessment is expensive, the researchers say that SETs "could serve as a low-cost mechanism for identifying" professors who need it – but only "with the understanding that many faculty so identified will be excellent teachers."

Last, the authors advise "caution in over-reliance on SET scores for any purpose."

Joshua Eyler, director of faculty development at the University of Mississippi and author of *How Humans Learn: The Science and Stories Behind Effective College Teaching*, commented on a study draft prior to publication. Evidently pleased with the results, he's the one who called the study a "game-changer" in the SET wars.

Eyler said this week that there is a big difference between asking students about a professor's "behaviors" – whether they have a sense of humor or they're engaging – and observing whether professors are using evidenced-based teaching strategies. That's because behaviors are rarely if ever correlated with student learning, whereas good strategies are.

With regard to SETs in particular, Eyler said that if an institution uses a form that poses real questions linked to student learning (and not behaviors), then SETS "have a role to play in providing formative, non-evaluative feedback for faculty." Yet they "should simply not be used for summative evaluations and decisions about someone's career," he cautioned, as the study makes clear that "even in a perfect world where we could somehow mitigate the bias of SETs, they would still be deeply flawed instruments."

Esarey said he endorsed what he called "multi-modal" assessments of teaching. Echoing him, Eyler said that the best tenure and promotion practices "employ multiple modes of evidence for teaching effectiveness." ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/02/27/study-student-evaluations-teaching-are-deeply-flawed

VIEWS

The Need for Self-Knowledge in a Changing World of Work

Sonali Majumdar emphasizes the power of self-knowledge for Ph.D. students and programs in helping prepare for future employment and societal needs.

By Sonali Majumdar // June 21, 2021

Recent years have seen a growing focus on making graduate education more inclusive, public-facing, connected to society – and on celebrating the career diversity of graduate students. Studies of Ph.D. career paths, such as the Survey of Earned Doctorates, the Ph.D. Career Pathways project and the Coalition for Next Generation Life Science, indicate that, for quite some time, the career paths of Ph.D. holders have been nonlinear and spanned diverse sectors – including academe, business, government and nonprofits.

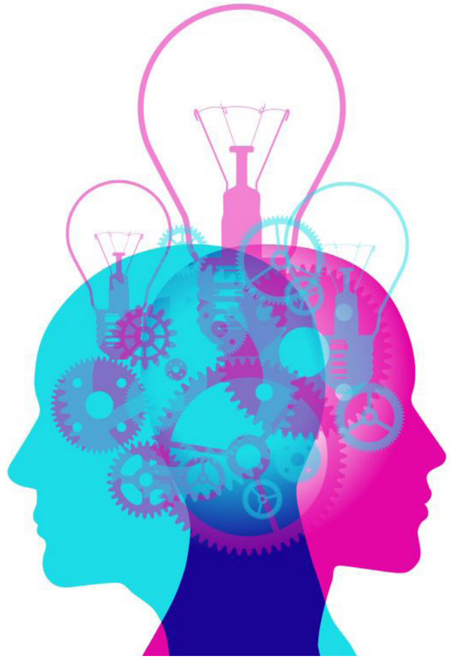
Further, the COVID-19 pandemic led to frequent discussions on the future of work in general. Numerous podcasts and webinars have conjectured about the rapidly changing landscape of work, the rapidly changing knowledge economy and the need for higher ed institutions to evolve in order to meet the future.

Amid these systems-level thinking and discussions about identifying opportunities within inevitable change, where does the rubber meet the road for Ph.D. students, faculty members and administrators? In this article, I suggest that self-knowledge is the first step toward taking control of preparing and positioning for the future.

As a future-focused graduate student, you may wonder how to prepare for the broad gamut of fulfilling jobs out there, as well as those jobs that haven't yet emerged but may be in great demand tomorrow. (Think data science five to 10 years back.) You can begin with one of the most important aspects of career development: self-knowledge, which involves understanding your relationship to work, your civic responsibility and your vision of the future.

Developing self-knowledge is important for your career development for a number of reasons. First, self-knowledge serves as a touchstone in a changing work environment and employment landscape. Data from participating universities of the Ph.D. Career Pathways project by the Council of Graduate Schools suggest Ph.D.s frequently change jobs at all career stages. That includes not just early-career Ph.D.s; as many as 40 to 60 percent of Ph.D.s across all disciplines who graduated eight years ago and 25 to 33 percent of those who graduated 15 years ago changed jobs within the last three years.

Therefore, you will very likely navigate many jobs in your career in various sectors, and while approaching diverse jobs and organizations, you need to be self-aware. For example, what are nonnegotiable, essential aspects of work that



IMRSQUID/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

you require for survival as well as fulfillment? What are few undesirable aspects of work that you can tolerate in reasonable doses? Reflecting on these questions will guide you in a process of elimination and help you focus on specific kinds of jobs that are good fits.

Second, self-knowledge is important for communicating your authentic and holistic self to potential employers. On job applications and during interviews, candidates are expected to demonstrate their interest in a specific position or organization. Job seekers who spend time evaluating how a job description and an organization's culture align with their values and interests can communicate their interest honestly and coherently.

Third, self-knowledge can help you navigate "gravity problems." In their book *Designing Your Life*, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans define gravity problems as those beyond your control and therefore not actionable. For example, if you are an international Ph.D. student in the United States, immigration policies may pose a gravity problem that influences your career decisions. In the face of such gravity problems, self-knowledge becomes even more important as you weigh employment options that resonate with your core values and interests as well as communicate your strengths to employers.

Finally, self-knowledge is an indicator of emotional intelligence; it involves self-assessment of your competency and strengths as well as informs your professional development goals for career advancement. Employers value individuals who possess these attributes and skills. Self-knowledge will go a long way in helping you collaborate with your employers toward your professional development and advancement in different career stages.

> "For example, what are nonnegotiable, essential aspects of work that you require for survival as well as fulfillment? What are few undesirable aspects of work that you can tolerate in reasonable doses?"

How to Gain Self-Knowledge

You should engage in a self-reflection process just as you approach research: in methodical and data-driven steps. I recommend you follow these steps.

- **Retrospection.** Retrospection, or the act of reflecting on your past, can be a great first step for gaining a fuller understanding of yourself. You can identify themes and driving motivations, whether reflecting on the past year or your overall professional history, such as why you picked a specific undergraduate major, why you applied to certain graduate programs and why you selected a specific research area. If you have prior work and volunteering experiences, what motivated you to pursue those opportunities? Retrospection helps connect the dots of a nonlinear career trajectory toward creating a coherent narrative of a complex career path.
- **Introspection.** Introspection involves reflecting on your current thoughts and feelings. After connecting with your past, you should examine your present self by considering the following questions: What parts of your day make you happy, inspired and engaged? What motivates you through challenging days? How does your worldview influence your relationship to work? One easy exercise is to make a list of likes and dislikes in your current work to help you identify your interests. Comparing observations from retrospection and introspection will provide better understanding of your professional and personal growth.
- **Extrapolation.** Extrapolation is the process of estimating the unknown by applying trends of the known. Given your past and present, what kind of future would you like to contribute to? What problems do you want to solve? What systems and practices would you like to change? How can you be an inclusive leader? I suggest three exercises: 1) read job descriptions, 2) conduct informational interviews and 3) try Intersect Job Simulations. In each case, imagine whether your future self would be happy or sad by attaching either figurative or literal emojis to each of the responsibilities and skills listed in job ads, highlighted in informational interviews or applied in job simulations. Extrapolation

will suggest multiple versions of your future self and may inform the kinds of work and professional cultures that will inspire you.

Additional Resources

If you want to gain more fluency and confidence in self-assessment and self-discovery, I recommend the following resources related to the career development of Ph.D.s.

- Imagine PhD, developed by the Graduate Career Consortium for social sciences and humanities Ph.D.s,
- myIDP by the American Association for the Advancement of Science for STEM Ph.D.s, and
- ChemIDP by the American Chemical Society for chemistry and related disciplines.

These books also offer guidance for professional development through self-discovery:

- *Start With Why* and *Find Your Why* by Simon Sinek, which provides successful examples and practical applications of discovering and communicating purpose;
- *Next Gen Ph.D.* by Melanie V. Sinche, which includes self-assessment guides for STEM career paths; and
- *Designing Your Life* and *Designing Your Work Life* by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, for defining and finding happiness in the ever-changing landscape of work.

Finally, I encourage you to acknowledge that versions of the self evolve with life experiences. While positive experiences can build self-confidence, negative and traumatic incidents may limit or damage it. You should seek professional help to process any traumatic events in your journey to self-empowerment. Ultimately, practicing self-care, celebrating diverse life experiences and joining supportive communities will contribute to self-efficacy in your professional and personal lives.

Self-Assessment of Ph.D. Programs

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and discussions on structural racism inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement renewed calls for making Ph.D. programs student-centered, inclusive and accessible. Amid those calls, *Putting the Humanities Ph.D. to Work*, by Katina L. Rogers, and *The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education*, by Leonard Cassuto and Robert Weisbuch, advocated for structural changes to the outdated, exclusionary systems and labor practices in academe and offered ideas for reforms. As departments are homes for Ph.D. programs, such systemic reforms will require faculty and administrators to honestly assess the cultures within their departments.

Toward that goal, the American Association of Universities launched the first phase of its Ph.D. Education Initiative with a pilot group of eight universities, representing 31 academic departments, to make graduate education more student-centered and the full range of Ph.D. career pathways more visible, valued and viable for all students.

Based on recommendations by Rogers, Cassuto and Weisbuch, and collaborative learning provided by the AAU Ph.D. Education Initiative, I encourage faculty and administrators at institutions to work together to understand and reflect on the following questions:

- What are the backgrounds, prior experiences and aspirations of your prospective and current graduate students?
- Which career paths have your Ph.D. alums taken?
- Does your department and university support diverse life experiences and the aspirations and professional development of current students toward the full range of career paths?

You should also consider implementing these actionable steps toward creating an inclusive and future-focused doctoral education:

- Keep current and prospective students informed about the dynamic, nonlinear career paths of Ph.D.s by making the career outcomes data of Ph.D. alumni accessible.
- Accept and celebrate the career diversity of Ph.D.s and use value-inclusive language instead of centering academe through use of terms such as “alternate careers” and “alt-ac.” Consider instead the inclusive terms suggested by the Council of Graduate Schools and capacious metaphors developed by James Van Wyck.
- Include frameworks for inclusive mentoring and preparing graduate students for diverse careers within program review process-

es, and integrate career and professional development training and experiential learning within the academic curriculum.

Now, more than ever, students, faculty and administrators have a moral imperative and civic responsibility as higher education citizens to improve our educational spaces and build societal trust. The work of self-improvement and the path toward wellness and holistic development begins with the self-knowledge of both Ph.D. students and the leaders of their departments. ■

"Accept and celebrate the career diversity of Ph.D.s and use value-inclusive language instead of centering academe through use of terms such as 'alternate careers' and 'alt-ac."

Bio

Sonali Majumdar is an associate director of professional development in the University of Virginia's Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs. She is a member of the Graduate Career Consortium, an organization providing an international voice for graduate-level career and professional development leaders.

GCC
GRADUATE CAREER CONSORTIUM

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2021/06/21/importance-self-knowledge-helping-prepare-future-employment-opinion

The Benefits of Higher-Order Multiple-Choice Tests

As instructors, we should rethink the premise that multiple-choice questions cannot meet the standards of authentic assessment, argues Eric Loepp. What if they could?

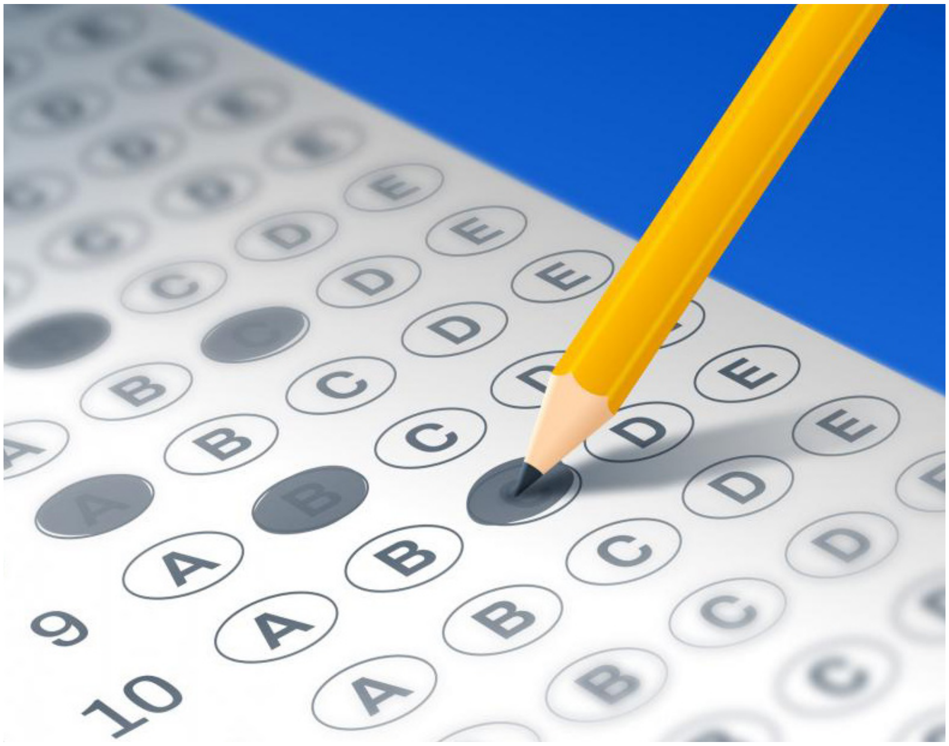
By Eric Loepp // June 23, 2021

In an excellent column, Ray Schroeder, senior fellow for the Association of Leaders in Online and Professional Education, laments the tendency for many instructors to rely on text-specific test banks as source material for student assessment. Not only are these inquiries susceptible to cheating, he says, they assess lower-order, nonlocalized and therefore less relevant knowledge like names and dates.

Schroeder praises Grant Wiggins's work on authentic assessment as a preferable standard for evaluation design. Authentic approaches require judgment and innovation, asking students to proactively apply knowledge and skills in realistic contexts. "There is no shortcut to demonstrating that you can apply what you have learned to a unique, newly shared situation," Schroeder asserts. I could not agree more. Authenticity is key.

But here is where things get tricky: Schroeder states, "Clearly, authentic assessments are never a multiple choice of a, b, c, d or true/false exams." There is certainly some truth to this. Multiple-choice assessments are, indeed, limited.

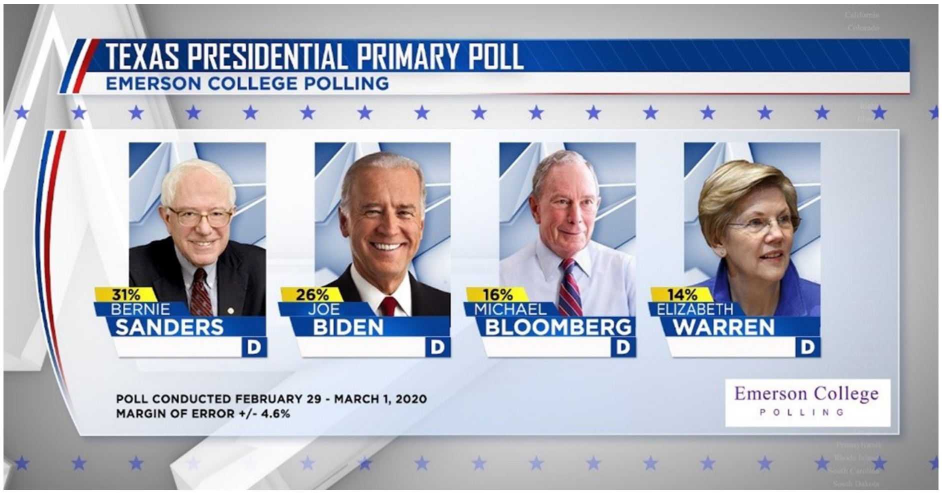
At the same time, many instructors, particularly those at teaching-intensive institutions or those leading high-enrollment courses, do not have the time to commit to more rigorous assessment exercises. I have discussed this issue with dozens of colleagues at conferences, as well as during numerous iterations of an online teaching institute I co-facilitate at my university. Multiple-choice assessments, many argue, are logistically necessary.



FILO/DIGITALVISION VECTORS/GETTY IMAGES

Students like them, too. I conducted a survey of over 1,400 college students in January 2021 and asked, among other things, what types of assessments they find work well in online and remote learning environments. Multiple-choice quizzes rated higher than any other instrument, including various forms of writing, research projects and presentations.

There are two explanations for this pattern. The first concerns academic integrity: multiple-choice assessments may simply be easier because students have access to the internet in non-face-to-face courses. (Proctoring services may mediate some cheating, but surveilling students during tests creates new challenges.) The second reason is that multiple-choice assessments are cognitively unambiguous and may provoke less anxiety when



students do not have access to an instructor to raise points of clarification. Students have told me both explanations are valid.

How might we resolve this dilemma? Authentic assessments are widely viewed as pedagogically superior, yet multiple-choice assessments are often preferable to instructors and students alike. The solution, in some cases at least, is to rethink the premise that multiple-choice questions cannot meet the standards of authentic assessment. What if they could?

Consider this example: I regularly teach political science research methods, and one goal in that course is that students develop technological literacy skills that will help them navigate the often-sticky world of data in politics. In pursuit of this goal, we study the science of sampling and the uncertainties it produces. It is vital that students can interpret the substantive meaning of a poll they see in the news media after factoring in various elements, such as its margin of error.

If I were to ask you, "What is the standard margin of error in a political poll?" in an online multiple-choice quiz, what would you do? If you did not know the answer, chances are you would copy that question into a search browser, or at least be tempted to do so if using the internet violated the terms of the assessment. I encourage you to take a moment and google the question above. Not only will you find dozens of pages that contain the answer, you may well see the answer in numerous page *previews* as you scroll down the screen.

This is a poorly designed multiple-choice question, one that falls short of the authentic standard described above. Not only is it easily searchable online, but the knowledge it assesses is not even that useful. It is the *application*, not the recognition, of a poll's margin of error that really matters. *That* is the skill I seek to cultivate in my students.

So what if I did the following instead: on a quiz, I provide students with an actual poll, and ask them to assume the role of a newspaper editor selecting a headline for a story about it.

Which newspaper headline most accurately describes the state of the Democratic primary race in Texas?

a. "Sanders Polling Far Ahead of All Candidates Ahead of Texas Election"

b. "Sanders and Biden Lead the Field, but No Clear Frontrunner"

c. "Bloomberg's Poor Poll Performance Shows Money Does Not Matter in Primaries"

d. "Warren Least Likely to Be Democratic Party Nominee in 2020"

e. "Inconclusive Polls Suggest Texans Split Evenly Among Candidates"

This question is superior in several ways. First, it is not particularly hackable. A test taker could not easily look up an answer to this question online. More importantly, the question is also much more authentic. It places students in a real-world context, asks them to engage in an important civic exercise and provides a basis for evaluating their ability to apply knowledge related to sampling and poll interpretation.

The same process can be applied to all sorts of content. My political science students respond to multiple-choice questions on a range of topics, such as determining which ballot-counting system would most benefit a particular candidate given a set of voters' preferences, advising a donor how they should spend their money based on campaign finance laws and judging whether a person's speech is protected by the First Amendment.

To be clear, these higher-order multiple-choice questions are not a panacea. There are certain features of authentic assessment, like integrating feedback or refining a product, for which they are not well suited. For instance, I would not use this method to assess students in a senior capstone course charged with recommending changes to the U.S. Constitution. More generally, I do not advise instructors to rely only on multiple-choice quizzes – or any singular method – when assessing student progress.

Yet we should not dismiss them entirely, either. The realities of higher education for many instructors and students render multiple-choice assessments a necessity, or at least very helpful under some circumstances. It does not need to be an either-or proposition. Instructors can upgrade – or, better yet, bypass – conventional test-bank multiple-choice items. In doing so, we simultaneously increase the relevance of these assessments and promote academic integrity. Higher-order multiple-choice assessments can be instruments on the assessment tool belt, along with other implements. Just be sure to make all of them authentic. ■

Bio

Eric Loepp is an associate professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2021/06/23/rethinking-multiple-choice-tests-better-learning-assessment-opinion

From Transfer to Learning as an Ongoing Journey

> California Community Colleges are moving the transfer focus from institutions to students by honoring learning outside the classroom, reducing obstacles and flexibly and innovatively delivering education.

By Marty Alvarado // April 22, 2021

As state policy makers and higher education leaders seek to build a skilled and upwardly mobile workforce, we have increasingly focused on transfer policy. Like the term "transfer" itself, those policies tend to focus on student movement across institutions, attempting to safeguard credit loss at each transition point. While this is important, it also reinforces approaches that center the institutions and not the students. Moving forward, it is also increasingly important that we expand our focus to ensure that all relevant learning is represented in the awarded credits and that every one of these credits counts in the transfer process toward a degree or credential.

Here at the California Community Colleges, our Vision for Success has had an intentional focus on increasing transfer by 35 percent. We have reached that goal well in advance of our five-year target in part because of the significant increase in the number of students who earn associate degrees and associate degrees for transfer. Yet we know we cannot stop there. Looking through an equity lens – which is how we are looking at every policy and practice these days – we have identified continued disparities in transfer outcomes.

The data show, for example, that barriers to transfer are producing a much lower rate of transfer to California State University and the University of California for Black students than our student population over all. We have made few gains in transfer outcomes for Black students since 2014, and transfer rates for Hispanic students have increased only two percentage points.

A New Vision for a Scaffolded, Student-Centered Learning Journey

These inequitable experiences for students, even in the face of systemwide improvements – which are similar nationwide – are what command our attention. In response to these and other persistent opportunity gaps, a long-overdue national reckoning with racial injustice, the global pandemic and widening income disparities, we are elevating student-centered approaches that focus on learning as an ongoing, scaffolded journey. This requires that we think beyond a narrow view of "transfer" to address the full range of complex learner journeys in order to ensure our students are able to apply their learning toward degrees and credentials with labor market value.

Our students are navigating off-ramps and on-ramps between learning and work more often than in the last century, when the linear school-to-work trajectory reigned. At the

California Community Colleges, we are doing more to meet students where they are, centering not only our enrolled students, especially Black and brown students, but also optimizing meaningful on-ramps to education for the 6.8 million adults in our communities without post-secondary degrees whom we may have failed in the past.

Honoring Learning Outside the Traditional Classroom

To fully scaffold lifelong learning, we're expanding ways to offer credit for college-level knowledge and skills, saving students time and money toward their goals. This is a new approach to credit applicability for our system, but it is necessary to close opportunity gaps and increase transfer and credential completion, and to help California recover with equity.

We are substantially shifting approaches and practices to those that center students and honor their contributions, responsibilities and achievements outside the traditional classroom and traditional college setting. Consistent with national trends, more than 40 percent of our 2.1 million students are over the age of 25. Many of these students come to us with industry credentials and workplace training, as graduates of public service academies, and with specialized military training. Our credit for prior learning policy and emerging competency-based education pilots aim to reform the previous approach to granting credit, which has historically been experienced by students as ad hoc and faculty-centered, causing it to feel subjective and inequitable. Our new approach systematizes how we formally recognize and build upon students' knowledge attainment – regardless of where it occurred – and provides greater consistency and transparency for students.

Dismantling the Obstacle Course to Lifelong Learning

Research demonstrates that students experience transfer as a confounding maze. We are systematizing support through Guided Pathways for students' growth and development and dismantling the obstacle course that sends students back to the starting line each time they enter a new institution of higher education. This requires collaborating not only with employers and other places where students attain knowledge, but also with our four-year postsecondary partners in California to ensure that our approach to enabling lifelong learning will not handicap students when they transfer, given our system's primary mission.

Our faculty are participating in professional development to ensure that prior learning assessments are rigorous and equitable. As students with credit from prior learning are far more likely to complete a postsecondary credential, we are standardizing credit awards as much as possible across colleges for common prior learning experiences like military training and industry credentials and connecting credit to courses. We are investing in a pilot network of colleges to support their implementation of direct assessment competency-based education in credit pathways to enable students to demonstrate mastery and progress outside the confines of traditional academic calendars. Pilot programs will offer pathways from information technology to business administration to early childhood education and will be designed to both ensure transfer options and meet workforce needs, advancing economic mobility and future stability for Californians.

> "In response to these and other persistent opportunity gaps, a long-overdue national reckoning with racial injustice, the global pandemic and widening income disparities, we are elevating student-centered approaches that focus on learning as an ongoing, scaffolded journey."

Bridging Learners' Academic and Nonacademic Worlds

Outside of these new approaches to credit applicability, we are also reforming other ways to serve students holistically, helping them bridge their academic and nonacademic worlds to enable lifelong learning. We are delivering courses in new formats and modalities to better accommodate the busy lives of our students, including those who juggle work and caregiving responsibilities. For example, several of our colleges are offering accelerated courses that run in half the time compared to traditional semesters, including at consistent times across semesters. At the same time, our California Virtual Campus Online Education Initiative is increasing access to online courses and full degree pathways that will extend the flexibility of hybrid and distance learning beyond the pandemic.

Scaffolding learner journeys also requires that we pay attention to the nonacademic factors that can derail students from their educational goals. Across our system, we're advancing one-stop shop models that integrate supports like childcare, tutoring and counseling.

We're also advocating for financial aid reform that better covers the full cost of attendance to help more students attend full-time.

There remains much work to be done, but by elevating student-centered approaches that honor learning outside the classroom, reducing the obstacles students face and flexibly and innovatively delivering education to meet and support learners where they are, we are striving to transform our institutions and close equity gaps. More importantly, we are signaling to every student that their worlds outside our classrooms matter and that we recognize the real meaning and value of their skills. We are being guided in these efforts by the central lesson we've learned in making our system more student-centered and equitable – in our work reforming assessment and placement and our work reforming transfer pathways, for example – that students deserve fair credit for their work and fair recognition of their skills. Always. ■

“ By elevating student-centered approaches that honor learning outside the classroom, reducing the obstacles students face and flexibly and innovatively delivering education to meet and support learners where they are, we are striving to transform our institutions and close equity gaps. ”

Bio

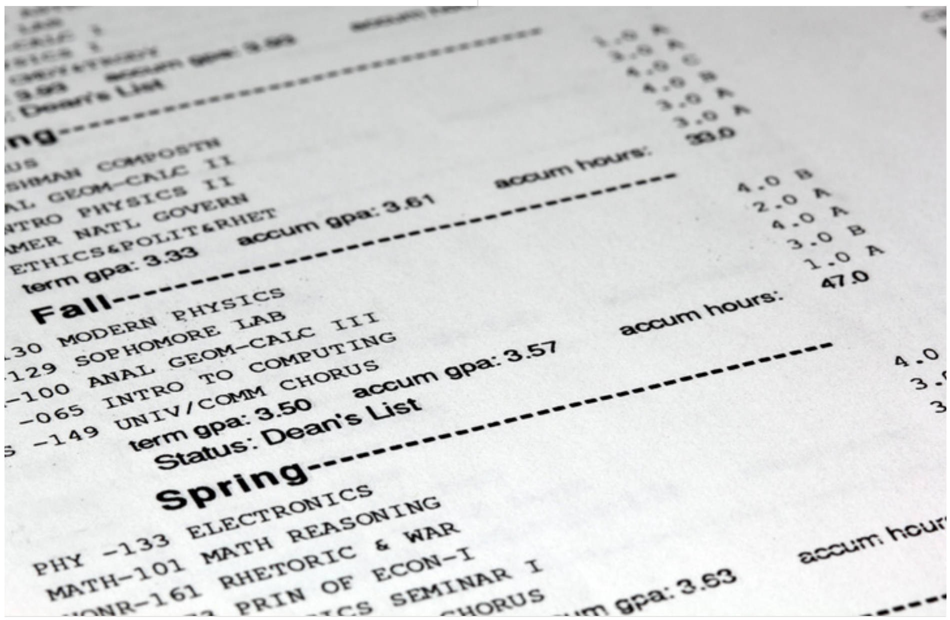
Marty Alvarado is executive vice chancellor for educational services of the California Community Colleges.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/tackling-transfer/transfer-learning-ongoing-journey

Creating Rich Transcripts for Career Activation

Institutions should be embarrassed by the standard transcripts they have been issuing, unchanged for a century, and students should demand better, argues Fred Cutler.

By Fred Cutler // January 20, 2021



THREESPEEDJONES/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

Around the world, many people have questioned or criticized the impoverished traditional transcript. A 2017 report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario reported, for example, that the "Current credential and accreditation system does not serve students well." The fact is that institutions should be embarrassed by the standard transcripts they have been issuing, unchanged for a century, and students should demand better.

Some colleges have launched programs to revise transcripts so they represent students' co- and extracurricular experiences, attaching to the standard transcript some electronically provisioned add-on that shows students' activities outside their coursework. Unlike the traditional transcript, where most courses are titled in terms of their content, such supplements often emphasize skills. Other tweaks on the standard transcript have supplemented the abbreviated course titles with some other information or, in the case of electronic transcripts, links to student production or a course website.

In alignment with those efforts and other broader initiatives to assist students in the transition to careers, the political science department at the University of British Columbia, where I am a professor, has worked to develop for its graduates a supplementary "rich transcript" that includes:

- The student's courses' full titles;
- A word cloud built from the instructors' detailed course descriptions for their courses (not the generic calendar descriptions);
- Aggregated statistics for each student on the number of writing assignments, pages written, peer reviews, oral presentations, hours of group work, research designs, primary research, internships and service learning; and
- A list of 23 skills showing in how many of the student's courses each skill was a key learning outcome.

Every student deserves this kind of report on their learning and skill development. In this article, I describe the five-year process that produced the rich transcripts for a pilot project for graduates of one major at my university in hopes it can inform others to consider how they might improve their students' transcripts, as well.

In our case, it all began when I started thinking about university transcripts and wondered if students could be given a better summary of their learning experiences. Those transcripts had the official stamp of the institution, some overabbreviated course names and, of course, grades – and nothing more. Not a great parting gift for students who had worked so hard, had a variety of learning experiences and developed a wide range of skills.

Fortunately, it was around this same time that the faculty of arts at the university was defining program learning outcomes and building a data mart including enrollment and course information. In addition, the career office was looking for more tools to help students articulate the skills they develop pursuing their degrees.

So the time seemed right to propose a pilot project: the Course Characteristics Census. The idea was to inventory our courses to find out how the instructor had designed the learning, what students were being asked to do in the course and what skills those instructors intended students to develop. Among the many benefits, we imagined that the course data could be aggregated by student to summarize each person's learning experiences, academic output and skill development.

> “Unlike the traditional transcript, where most courses are titled in terms of their content, such supplements often emphasize skills. Other tweaks on the standard transcript have supplemented the abbreviated course titles with some other information or, in the case of electronic transcripts, links to student production or a course website.”

Gathering the Data: A Course Inventory

We started by examining how we might best collect the relevant information about each course. The natural place to start was to gather syllabi and code them. The dean's office and other department heads suggested that approach because they thought the syllabi would contain a clear indication of the learning activities and skills to be developed in the class. Moreover, faculty members wouldn't have to be asked to do anything.

But it soon became clear that the syllabi were extremely varied, with only a few providing the information required, especially on learning objectives in terms of skill development. Some were even inaccessible because departments had not been required or encouraged to archive their syllabi, and some former instructors were unreachable.

We decided to try a different approach to gather a broader set of, and more reliable, data. In consultation with experts on pedagogy and assessment and, of course, the department itself, we built a questionnaire to gather detailed information on characteristics of courses: learning outcomes defined as skills, teaching modalities, learning activity structure, assessments, work time expectations, technology use and special features like community service learning or primary research.

But unlike an ordinary internal university survey that might have value with, say, a 20 percent response rate, we realized we would need a 100 percent response rate if we were going to be able to aggregate the course information for each student covering all of their learning in the political science major, without any gaps. In other words, we would need to conduct a census, not a survey.

The final questionnaire typically took 20 minutes per instructor per course. Obviously, we didn't ask instructors to repeat it if they had not significantly changed their course design from year to year. Still, it was a tremendous challenge getting information on *every course* taught in the department by full-time and part-time faculty over the course of four years. We only succeeded because we had the strong participation of the department chair and I was able to twist my colleagues' arms in a way that only a colleague can do. Even then, we were missing a few courses, particularly those that sessional lecturers and postdocs taught.

An academic unit trying to gather this information should consider the time lag from beginning to collect the data to the point when the rich transcript can be issued for the first time. It is theoretically possible to start by trying to gather the data back five years to cover the course history of the students about to graduate. In our case, we gathered it over four years and then did the data processing and issued these rich transcripts. Even then, at the end of those four years, we had to go back to fill in some missing responses and try to collect data on courses as far back as seven years.

Lesson 1: To provide rich transcripts to students based on instructor-provided data, you must obtain full buy-in from the department chair to use all methods to ensure that every instructor fills out the questionnaire for all of their courses over a few years.

Lesson 2: Different strategies are required to ensure the participation of different types of instructors. We had to write a census response requirement into the contract of part-time instructors. And we had to tell full-time faculty repeatedly that this was mandatory because, without full participation, students would not get a complete rich transcript and any reputational or student-satisfaction benefit to the department would not be realized.

Manipulating the Data: Creating the Transcripts

We needed course information for 237 distinct course-instructor pairs. That is, if both Professor Apple and Professor Plum taught POLI367, we needed data from each of them. But if Professor Apple taught the course four times, we only needed that one data point from her unless she significantly changed the course design. Our goal was to match that course-instructor data to the enrollment histories of two cohorts (550 graduates) from our political science major.

We first defined what indicators we wished to include in the rich transcript – what features of the courses could be aggregated and be most useful for students. Broadly, those were output, experiences and skills.

Lesson 3: Define what indicators you want to surface for students and for the program before composing the questionnaire. Consider how the data will be aggregated, and formulate questions to facilitate easy data processing.

We settled on these items as the content of the rich transcript:

- A list of the student's courses with the real substantive titles, not the official calendar titles;
- A word cloud from the course descriptions written by the instructors, not the calendar description;
- For each student, a tally of their output: the number of writing assignments; written output in pages; number of peer reviews and oral presentations; hours of group work; and the number of some enriched learning activities like a research design, primary field research, community and global service learning, and so on;
- A tally of the number of courses for that student in which 23 different skills were a key learning objective, including common ones like "Write clearly and effectively" as well as others like "Develop or clarify a personal code of ethics" or "Perform mathematical or formal/logical analysis."

After we settled on the content, we had to design the final product. The approach was to create a two-page infographic-style document. A designer was brought in to work with our data scientist who would be batch-producing the rich transcripts in Tableau, a data science and data visualization tool.

The result is a document that looks official as well as engaging and is suitable for both print and screen. We designed it to be a document that a reader can digest in just a minute or two but with enough detail that a student can point to it in a job interview and provide examples of their output, learning activities and skill development.

The team's data scientists merged the course and enrollment data and then produced PDF files for each student. Finally, the PDF transcripts were attached to individual emails to students through a mail-merge operation.

Surveying Student Reactions

We sent a follow-up survey to the students to gauge their reactions as well as to prod them to look at their transcript again and use it in their career-development activities and job searches. We asked students if they saw value in their rich transcript and how they imagined using and sharing it.

All but a handful of those who responded had opened their transcript, and, in fact, two-thirds had opened and reviewed it more than once. The mean overall rating of the value of the transcript was four on a zero to five scale, while the rating for "usefulness for career" was slightly lower, at 3.4. When asked on a zero to 10 scale if they would recommend that other colleges offer this to their students, three-quarters gave a response at seven or above, with 30 percent giving a 10.

About two-thirds of the students had already shown it to friends or family when we followed up with them a few weeks after they first received it. Sixty percent said they thought they were likely to show it to a prospective employer at some point.

Many of the student reactions spontaneously referred to the benefits of their rich transcript for career activation. One person said, "I was originally hired as a panel administer for a broadcast measurement company and was promoted in March to a position that requires a lot of writing and teamwork. For my job application and interview, I was able to use the specifics in the transcript to identify what I did during undergrad. Thank you and the department for putting it together!"

We received suggestions for further development of the rich transcripts. One of the most common was to allow students to access the report online as they progress through their degree, so they can see what skills they are accumulating. Some even suggested that the information about learning activities and skills development be available while students are selecting courses so that they can "fill gaps" in their skill set by choosing courses with particular learning activities and outcomes. We intend to pursue those suggestions. We will also reach out to employers for their views about the value of the current rich transcript document and any suggestions for improvement.

Future Directions

Going forward, we will now systematize and streamline the data-gathering and production processes for scaling up to multiple departments. We'll also work to integrate the rich transcripts with efforts to support students and alumni in their career preparation and job search by building a set of accompanying materials to help students understand how to use their rich transcript as they start their career journey.

During this consolidation phase, we will elaborate a process framework, providing a kit that any department can use to conduct a course characteristics census and produce rich transcripts. The process phases will be, roughly:

- Definition of desired rich transcript content;
- Development of the instructor questionnaire through consultation;
- Questionnaire administration, including timing;
- Data manipulation;
- Joining course data to student enrollment data;
- Rich transcript visual/graphic design;
- Production of rich transcripts;
- Distribution;
- Integration with student and alumni career resources; and
- Evaluation

Over the long term, we should also be able to first, issue interim rich transcripts at the end of each semester so students can track their learning experiences and skills development, and second, make the course census information available to students as they choose their courses. Students could then more consciously and accurately build their own program to acquire and develop a wide range of skills – and perhaps deep competency in one or two. ■

Bio

Fred Cutler is associate professor of political science at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and co-founder of the WeVu video platform.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/01/20/students-should-demand-better-college-transcripts-opinion

Who Needs Remediation?

No one, argues Alexandra W. Logue.

By Alexandra W. Logue // February 3, 2021

This piece isn't about the fact that traditional remediation is a bottomless pit from which many students never escape (though it is a bottomless pit). And it isn't about the fact that corequisite remediation and assignment to college-level courses do a much better job at helping students progress in college and graduate than does traditional remediation (though they do, even for students who are assessed as having the lowest levels of academic skills). Much has already been stated and written about both those topics.

This piece is about the actual word "remediation" – that we don't need it anymore and should get rid of it and its analogue developmental education, as well as the whole conceptual framework that surrounds both of those terms.

In higher education, we use the word "remediation" to describe what amounts to removing or fixing a deficit in people who are supposed to have some specific knowledge or skills but don't. The three common academic areas in which students are deemed to need remediation are writing, reading and math. My work has been in the area of math remediation, so I will use that area to illustrate my points in this essay, but those points can also apply to writing and reading remediation.

In considering what happens with remedial math, note that: 1) colleges and universities presume students have had algebra in high school, and 2) most colleges and universities require students to pass some sort of quantitative coursework, usually college algebra or precalculus, in order to receive their degrees. It has also been common practice for institutions to test prospective or new college students to see if they can demonstrate knowledge of high school algebra. If not, most institutions assign students to traditional, remedial, prerequisite, noncredit courses that repeat material those students had in high school, delay their college graduation, use up their financial aid and sap their motivation. As a result, all else being equal, students assigned to traditional math remediation are significantly less likely to persist in college and graduate.

However, colleges and universities are increasingly setting as their math requirement whatever type of math will most help a student with their major, career and life beyond higher education. Therefore, social science majors now often take solely statistics to satisfy their college math requirement, and humanities majors often take solely a course called quantitative reasoning. Neither of those courses involves much algebra, and if a student needs some extra help with the algebra that is involved in such a course, the institution provides that help by offering a variety of types of

BRAUNS/E+/GETTY IMAGES

academic support, such as tutoring or, in a more intensive and required version, what is known as corequisite remediation. We now recognize that most people do not need to be fluent in advanced algebra in order to function well in our society. (How many people ever need to use quadratic equations?) Further, many people actually enjoy and benefit from studying math that is relevant to their future success.

In addition, we now recognize that the methods of assessment we use to determine someone's prior math knowledge and skills are often inaccurate. In math, we see more false negatives – cases of students being identified as not knowing certain aspects of math when they would do perfectly fine in advanced math – than false positives – cases of students being identified as knowing certain aspects of math when they will not do well in advanced math. Prior high school grades do a better job than high-stakes, one-off tests in identifying who is and is not likely to do well in a college-level math course that assumes some prior math knowledge. But all methods of assessment give false positives and false negatives.

In other words, traditional remediation often involves falsely stating that students don't have something, and what students are said not to have is actually something that many students don't need. Yet we require students to go through a costly, stigmatizing and demoralizing process called "remediation" – which by the very word labels them as being deficient. It is hardly a word (or a process) likely to inspire and motivate students.

For many years now, researchers and practitioners have recognized many of these problems with the term "remedial education," and therefore some of them have proposed an alternative: developmental education. That term is thought to "focus on the process of learning as well as the content to be mastered." However, the term "developmental education" can still have negative connotations. To someone familiar with developmental psychology, the phrase "developmental education" sounds like education designed to take someone from a younger to an older state, or from a more childlike to a more adult state, or even from a less developed to a more developed state. Such a description again can be thought of as labeling a student as somehow deficient and needing to be "fixed" – another characterization not likely to inspire or motivate students but instead leave those thus labeled open to pejorative comments.

> "This piece is about the actual word 'remediation' – that we don't need it anymore and should get rid of it and its analogue developmental education, as well as the whole conceptual framework that surrounds both of those terms."

I noted that, in recent years, college are permitting more students to take statistics instead of college algebra or precalculus in order to satisfy their math requirement. That has resulted in more math faculty members having to teach statistics rather than algebra or precalculus. Some of them have never taught statistics, and some have never even taken it. As a result, they need to learn, or relearn, statistics before teaching it.

But do we call that instruction of faculty remediation or developmental education? No, we call it professional development. Why not also conceive of students, when they reinforce needed quantitative knowledge and skills, as undergoing professional student development, rather than remediation or developmental education?

At some colleges, the remediation framework has negative consequences even beyond extra course costs, graduation delay and possible pejorative labeling. For example, the City University of New York assesses all new freshmen before they begin classes as being college "proficient" or not. If a student is assessed as not college proficient in math or writing/reading, then by CUNY policy (with a few exceptions), that student must enroll in an associate's degree program (most of which are in CUNY community colleges), instead of in a bachelor's program (in what are known at CUNY as senior colleges), in addition to undergoing some form of remedial education. This is despite the fact that most CUNY community college freshmen, as is true nationally, wish to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Thus, identifying new CUNY students as needing remediation means that such students are eventually going to need to transfer to a college that offers bachelor's degrees in order to achieve their higher education goal. Much research has shown that, all else being equal, due to the externally imposed difficulties in transferring (such as credit loss), a student who wishes to obtain a bachelor's degree will be less likely to obtain one if they begin their postsecondary experience at a community college.

Add to this the fact that students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups are on average more likely to be assessed as needing remediation because of a variety of environmental factors – such as having had to attend high schools of lower quality, experiencing the phenomenon known as stereotype threat, being subject to discriminatory remedial categorization and having relatively fewer financial resources. The result is that the whole remedial/developmental education framework can be seen as promoting racial/ethnic inequity, as a form of institutional racism and as a civil rights issue.

Undoubtedly the people involved in establishing and maintaining traditional remediation never intended those policies and processes to have such detrimental effects. They thought that traditional remediation was the best way to help students who had experienced an unsupportive environment. But the data tell us that the remediation system further disadvantages, rather than helps, students who have already suffered an unfair share of environmental challenges.

Instead of a deficit model that employs the words "remediation" and "developmental education," what conceptual framework should we use? Why not think of each college student as an individual – with individual knowledge, skills, needs and goals – and each college as an institution that provides the instruction and support each student needs to achieve those goals? In this proposed conceptual framework, the words "remediation" and "developmental education" have no meaning, and traditional remediation does not exist.

In this framework, corequisite remediation gets renamed as corequisite support. And corequisite support is simply an expansion of the tutoring and many other forms of academic support that colleges already provide for many kinds of academic pursuits. Colleges would still decide who gets admitted and who doesn't, but they would base those decisions on students' high school records and the compatibility of students' academic goals with the academic programs the colleges offer.

During this time in which some people are accusing others of abandoning their humanity, let us make our higher education systems and processes person-centered, dedicated to the success of every individual. Let us acknowledge that no one needs remediation. ■

Bio

Alexandra W. Logue is a research professor at the Center for Advanced Study in Education of the City University of New York Graduate Center.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/02/03/academe-should-get-rid-remediation-and-conceptual-framework-surrounds-it-opinion

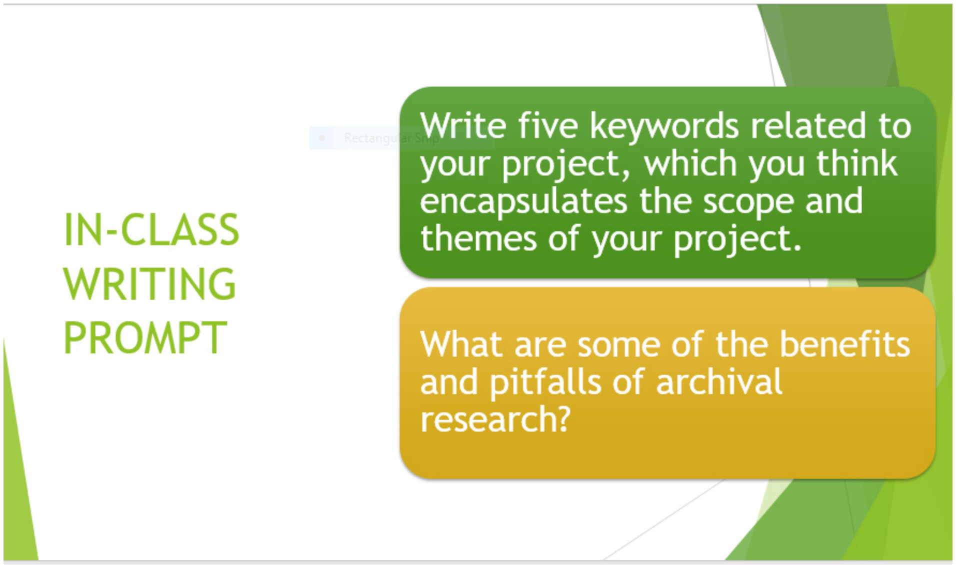
Assessing Students' Participation

Ideas for evaluating students' course participation.

By Sritama Chatterjee // March 24, 2020

When I initially envisioned writing this piece, I did not think that I would be writing it at a time when classes in many universities in the U.S. and worldwide would be conducted remotely and/or online because of the ongoing crisis that the pandemic has brought upon us. Therefore, many of the aspects of assessing students' participation that I would write in this piece would probably not be applicable for remote learning, though some of them might be useful. Given the circumstances that we are in because of COVID-19, I am adamant about the need to be generous with assessing students' participation in the virtual medium, as it's important that we look out for each other as a community, and the space of the virtual classroom is no different for me.

I started thinking carefully about ways of assessing students' participation when I realized one month into the last semester that if I assessed students' participation based only on verbal modes of participation, it would not be a holistic model of evaluating them. I admit that I am an extroverted grad student and did not initially consider that students might not feel comfortable speaking in the classroom for various reasons that include cultural differences (not to homogenize a category such as international students, but this is something one should be especially cognizant of, if one has international students in the class) or not feeling confident to speak up because they think what they are saying is wrong or incorrect.



PowerPoint slide of an in-class writing prompt that I have used as part of freewriting.

I was also facing an additional difficulty -- they would talk to me when I asked them a question or share their responses about a text, but they would not build on one another's arguments. I immediately realized that I needed to think of alternative ways through which participation can be assessed. In this semester, I had an early conversation with my students about what might constitute evidence of their engagement in the class, and their participation grades would not depend on how many times they are speaking in the class. Rather, I would pay particular attention to how they were listening and building on a comment or a point that their peer made or drawing on an argument made in previous classes.

In-class writing: After my realization, I started every class with an in-class writing prompt, which they were welcome to share in class, but it was never compulsory for them to share. Furthermore, they would have the option of submitting five pieces of what they thought were their best pieces of in-class writing as part of their final portfolio, and I would count their in-class writing toward their participation grade. Considering that so many classes have shifted online now, the in-class writing would also work well if a class is being delivered synchronously. Students could have the option of sharing their in-class writing on a discussion thread on the learning management software of the university.

Using Google Docs: In normal circumstances, I would often have a collaborative class Google Doc where students have the option of taking notes or putting in comments/thoughts that they otherwise might not be comfortable sharing during the large group discussions. In the current circumstances of remote teaching, I would use Google Docs differently to promote community in the virtual classroom: one (pre-allocated) group of five students would be responsible for posting five discussion questions, another group of five would respond to the first three questions, another group of five would respond to the last two questions and the final group would summarize the discussion or post additional resources related to the reading. They would need to consult among themselves and post on the Google Docs within a predetermined time.

Peer review: As I require students to turn in their peer-review sheets, I take into account how students provide feedback to their peers and how effective that feedback is. The peer review is an essential component of assessing student participation. I also periodically make sure to applaud students who are effective peer reviewers. With the shift to remote teaching, it is still possible to continue with the peer reviews online because often many learning management systems such as Canvas have built-in peer-review options. Alternatively, you can preassign peer reviewers and then have them email each other's drafts for comments and feedback.

Collaborative annotation: With classes shifting online, one of the activities that I am considering doing with my students is to engage in collaborative annotation of texts, which might also be an effective way to gauge how involved students are. A free tool that I have found particularly useful is hypothes.is, which can be used to annotate material available on the web. I am thinking of using this tool specifically for the public writing unit of my class. They have also waived the fee for educational institutions for this year.

Contribution to class Zotero library: Although I did not get an opportunity to train my students in using Zotero this semester, for the next semester I am planning to have an option where students could contribute to the class Zotero library, add a note about the entry and get participation credits for it. I also think that it is a wonderful way of building class resources, and students might feel encouraged to contribute if they know that counts as a valid way of assessing participation. I will be forever grateful to one of my mentors, Peter Odell Campbell, for introducing me to Zotero during his graduate seminar and encouraging us to contribute to the class Zotero library.

Small group discussions: During the midterm conferences that I had with my students both last semester and also in this semester, a number of students disclosed to me that they are more comfortable opening up in small group settings. Therefore, during small group discussions (ideal for groups of three), I would often allocate different roles for each participant: mediator, note taker and a speaker, who would share with the class what the group came up with. Their roles would change from one day of the class to another. Here's another useful way of navigating classroom discussion using dice devised by Shiladitya Sen, which has an element of fun in it which I have found helpful in engaging students.

What are some of the ways you use to assess student participation in your classes? How are you adapting them during remote teaching? Please let us know in your comments below. ■

Bio

Sritama Chatterjee is a second-year Ph.D. student in the department of English at the University of Pittsburgh. You can find her on Twitter @SritamaBarna.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/assessing-students%E2%80%99-participation

Inside Higher Ed

1150 Connecticut Avenue NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

Image Sources
iStock.com
GettyImages.com