ABSTRACT

Under the AACSB’s new accreditation standards, known as "Assurance of Learning", business schools must set learning outcomes for their programs, and then demonstrate that the students have met the specified learning goals by conducting assessment. This paper describes the characteristics of assessments that produce valid and reliable results for making informed academic decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is in the midst of an “assessment movement.” Reflective of this movement, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International has established new accreditation standards requiring business schools to produce evidence of learning in their courses and programs. Under the AACSB’s new accreditation standards, known as "Assurance of Learning", business schools must set learning outcomes for their programs – i.e., the knowledge and skills that their students are expected to learn -- and then must demonstrate that the students have met the specified learning outcomes. The new accreditation standards leave it up to each institution to decide what those learning outcomes should be and how they should be measured.

For compliance with the “Assurance of Learning” standard, the AACSB has suggested two measurement categories for the assessment and monitoring of student learning. They are as follows:

Direct Methods:
1. Selection
2. Course-embedded measurement
3. Stand-alone testing

Indirect Methods:
   a. Surveying alumni
   b. Surveying employers
   c. Surveying graduating students

The AACSB has clearly stated that the indirect methods cannot replace the direct methods for assessment of student performance. By themselves, surveys produce only weak evidence of learning.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

Benefits of assessment are enormous. Assessment allows for:
1) Accountability by determining the extent to which the school’s and the course learning outcomes have been accomplished
2) Monitoring the student learning and progress
3) Identifying strengths and weaknesses of courses and programs
4) Planning and improvement of courses and programs
5) Carrying out curriculum evaluation and refinement

Assessment methods range in complexity and format. It can be as simple as an instructor's subjective judgment based on a single observation of the student performance, or as complex as a several hours of standardized or open-ended exam.

However, there are a number of factors that affect the quality of and the reliability of the assessment results – format, test validity, content, etc. The purpose of this paper is to address the characteristics of good assessment.

GOOD ASSESSMENT

Good assessment data provides accurate estimates of student learning and performance and enables instructors or other decision makers to make appropriate decisions for continuous improvement of the academic programs. Good assessment data is particularly essential for the deployment of effective to “Close the loop” -- driving the outcomes from the assessment back into the curriculum to enhance student learning.

At two of the authors’ school, the learning outcomes of the BBA program and the majors programs are transformed into specific course learning outcomes for various business core and major courses. A Course Information Sheet is prepared by the faculty for each course to demonstrate the link between the learning outcomes for the BBA and the major programs and the learning outcomes for an individual course. The appropriateness of the course learning outcomes is checked by obtaining the area practitioners point of views to assure the relevancy of the outcomes for the real business world. Faculty teaching each course, by embedding questions in the exams, quizzes, or other assignments, measures the extent of the students’ learning in each specific course learning outcome. Faculty members report the course-embedded assessment results as part of the annual evaluation. The underlying rationale for adopting the course embedded-assessment is that when student “learning” is the focus of assessment, the School can achieve its mission along with academic excellence. The following checklist is applied to guide and encourage faculty to conduct a meaningful assessment and undertake continuous improvement efforts to close the loop.

I. Course Learning Outcomes

1. Are course learning outcomes clear and measurable?
2. Have the learning outcomes for this course been approved by the faculty members teaching the course?
3. Have the learning outcomes for this course been approved by the faculty members teaching in the course discipline?
4. Have the learning outcomes for this course been reviewed by a knowledgeable business person(s) for relevancy to the real world business needs?
5. Have you shared the course learning outcomes with your Assessment Mentor?
II. Validity and Reliability of Assessment Data

1. Is the assessment data based on “classroom-based direct assessment”?
2. Did your assessment include all of the learning outcomes planned for the course?
3. Did your assessment include the most important knowledge and skills pertaining to each course learning outcome?
4. Did you assess the learning outcomes from three angles – (a) Knowledge - ability to remember definitions, specific facts, and principles; (b) Comprehension -- ability to distinguish and interpret the meanings of materials; (c) Application -- ability to use the learned materials in new situations by solving problems?
5. Were the assessment questions all linked to the specific course learning outcomes?
6. Did your assessment contain a sufficient number of questions pertaining to each learning outcome given the scope of each learning outcome?
7. What format of questions did you utilize in your assessment? (You may check more than one if applicable.)
   ___Multiple Choice Questions
   ___Other Non-multiple Choice Objective Questions
   ___Essay Questions
   ___Problems
   ___Other, please specify________________________________________________
8. What means did you utilize for conducting your current assessment? (You may check more than one if applicable.)
   ___Comprehensive Final Exam
   ___Midterm Exams
   ___Project/paper/case
   ___Quizzes
   ___Other, please specify________________________________________________
9. Are the assessment results generalize-able -- that is, one can safely generalize that the student will likely do as well on similar aspects of a learning outcome not included in the assessment?
10. Were the questions utilized for assessment correct, fair, and clear?
11. Have you developed a test bank for conducting assessment?
12. Were the assessment questions chosen randomly from test bank and were free from bias?

III. Assessment Results

1. Have you utilized the suggested format by the Assessment Committee for preparing your assessment results table?
2. Does your assessment results table clearly state the degree to which each course learning outcome has been accomplished?
3. Based upon your analysis of the assessment results, which course learning outcomes require attention and further improvement?
4. Have you found conducting this assessment useful in anyway? Why “Yes” or “No”?

IV. Continuous Improvement

1. Have you made or plan to make any changes in your instruction of this course (course delivery, course materials, etc.) based upon the results of the current assessment? What, if any?
2. What changes have you made in the instruction of this course based upon prior assessment results, if any?
3. Based upon the assessment results and your observations, what would you recommend to the School of Business for consideration?

CONCLUSION

The AACSB’s new "Assurance of Learning" standard has generated substantial interest in measuring and monitoring student learning in college and university programs and courses. The purpose of this paper was to point out the characteristics of good assessments as perceived by the authors and two of the authors’ school. Valid and reliable assessment data is essential for continuous improvement of students’ learning and making informed academic decisions.

REFERENCES


