



Assessment Updates

“Asking questions about student learning, including exploring the effectiveness of pedagogies and educational experiences, is the discovery role of assessment. ... The results of that collective inquiry deepen our understanding of what students learn, which students learn, when they learn, and how they learn and develop.”

(Peggy Maki. *A Shared Commitment*, 2002 AAHE Conference)

Faculty Senate Approves University-wide Student Learning Outcomes

K-State’s Faculty Senate, in their meeting on April 13th, passed and approved the University-wide Student Learning Outcomes. This is a milestone in the process of improving student learning through clear expectations for our graduates.

The “Objectives of the Educational Program” that currently exists in the undergraduate catalog will be replaced with the following information:

Kansas State University strives to create an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity and growth, one in which academic freedom, breadth of thought and action, and individual empowerment are valued and flourish. We endeavor

to prepare citizens who will continue to learn and will contribute to the societies in which they live and work.

Students share in the responsibility for a successful university educational experience. Upon completion of their degree and regardless of disciplinary major, undergraduates are expected to demonstrate ability in at least five essential areas.

Knowledge.

Students will demonstrate a depth of knowledge and apply the methods of inquiry in a discipline of their choosing, and they will demonstrate a breadth of knowledge across their choice of varied disciplines.

Critical Thinking.

Students will demonstrate the ability to access and interpret information, respond and adapt to changing situations, make complex decisions, solve problems, and evaluate actions.

Communication.

Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate clearly and effectively.

Diversity.

Students will demonstrate awareness and understanding of the skills necessary to live and work in a diverse world.

Academic and Professional Integrity.

Students will demonstrate awareness and understanding of the ethical standards of their academic discipline and/or profession.

- ♣ Have an interesting assessment story to share?
- ♣ Need more information on assessment?
- ♣ Need to contact us?

Please email or call

Patricia Marsh
(Coordinator, Office of APR)

at

pmarsh@k-state.edu

or

785-532-5712

Why Grades are Not Enough

It is not uncommon to hear questions such as ‘why do assessment when students are already tested and assigned grades?’; ‘why do assessment when those students who do not meet course requirements are failed?’; ‘why do assessment at all?’ (Wright, 1999).

Grades and GPAs are a reflection of a student’s overall academic achievement. However, they are too broad to provide information on what the stu-

dent has actually learned in the course. Neither do they provide information on what exactly are the students’ competencies or talents, unless broken down to assess the components of expected learning outcomes (Lopez, 1997). Several students may have the same grades, but they can be weak on some specific knowledge/ability and this can not be captured by grade alone. Findings on specific strengths and weaknesses can help fac-

ulty determine ways to enhance the students’ learning on specific learning outcomes or expectations.

Peter Ewell (2004) observes that grades cannot communicate about the outcomes of ‘groups’ of courses. He also cautions that there can be lack of agreed-upon content, expectations for students, and evaluations of students’ work can be inter-subjectively unreliable.

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Sources:

Ewell, Peter, 2004, *Assessment that Matters; Creating Authentic Academic Cultures of Evidence*, US Naval Academy, Teaching & Learning Center, Assessment Colloquium Presentations, downloaded from <http://www.usna.edu/CTL/DeptPosters/DeptPoster.htm>

Lopez, Cecilia, March 1996, Reprinted April 1997, *Opportunities for improvement:: Advice for Consultant Evaluators on Program to Assess Student Learning*, <http://www.ncacihe.org/resources/assessment/>

Nichols, James O., 2000, *The Departmental Guide and Record Book for Student Outcomes Assessment & Institutional Effectiveness*, 3rd Edition, Agathon Press, pp. 42-44.

Wright, Barbara D., 1999, *Evaluating Learning in Individual Courses*, downloaded from Resource page of the California Assessment Institute, <http://www.ca-assessment-inst.org/Resources/Resources.htm>

Why Grades ...

James Nichols (2000) also echoes that the call for assessment goes beyond the course level, because assessment emphasizes (a) integration of the students' learning experiences across courses in their degree programs rather than from one course and (b) freeing the single faculty member (but not the combined departmental faculty) of the complete responsibility for the assessment of program accomplishments. There are many instances in which graduates who, though receiving passing marks and a degree from an institution, do not measure up to expectations of employers or graduate programs. Others argue that students are not engaged in the development of their communities.

As Barbara Wright (1999) further explains, assessment is improvement of student learning that is closely aligned with good, innovative curricular and teaching practices. Thus, she elaborates on several ways that **grading is not identical to assessment** (i.e., as it has been defined within many

departments):

i) Grades are primarily summative to indicate final achievement while assessment also monitors the learning process (p. 4).

ii) Testing and grading tend to focus on rather small units of learning (e.g., this chapter, this course, this semester) but assessment takes both a narrower (e.g., classroom assessment techniques of Angelo and Cross (1993) to determine how well students are learning in class) and a broader view (e.g., asking larger questions about total students' educational experience such as with both curricular and co-curricular experience) (p. 5).

iii) In testing and grading, discussions on criteria for grading are only informally and privately discussed. In the assessment process, a collaborative faculty responsibility to improve learning provides the setting to discuss agreed-upon learning outcomes, expectations, goals and criteria (p.5).

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iv) In testing and grading, grades add up to a cumulative end point. On the other hand, assessment for educational improvement, requires enhancements and repetitive observations, regular reflection and a longitudinal focus.

v) In testing and grading, the efforts of both students and faculty remain individual or – in the case of faculty – at best, departmental. In assessment, however, faculty (and when applicable, students) work together while academic administration provides a supportive context (p.6).

vi) Both testing and grading of students and student evaluations of faculty are aimed at pronouncing a judgement on the success or failure of a particular actor in the educational process. They are not, however, focused in a nonjudgemental way on describing, understanding, or improving the educational process itself (p.6).

How the Grading Process Can Be Modified for Assessment

Palomba and Banta (1999) suggest that for grades to work in the assessment process, grades need to be linked to the learning goals of the course as well as on established criteria and standards of learning (p.162). Faculty expertise needs to be developed in the grading process of assessment. Faculty need to develop criteria/standards for grading assignments (e.g., Primary Trait Analysis), and then be willing to share more publicly this information for assessment

purposes.

As they cited from Walvoord & Anderson (1995), “information of this nature should include the course objectives, few examples of how these objectives will be measured, the scoring scales or methods of observation used, samples of student work that have already been graded, scores that students got on assignments over time, as well as how the results were connected to the teaching and learning process. These types

of summaries from faculty members will help to visualize how an overall academic program is working. Sometimes, sharing results among faculty in the department alone can generate discussion and thus bring about channels of improvement” (p.163).

Experts also agree that assessment from a single means can bring only partial results. Using multiple measures for each of the student outcomes identified creates a more complete picture of student learning.

Source:

Banta, Trudy B. and Catherine A. Palomba, *Assessment Essentials*, 1999, Jossey-Bass Publishers, pp. 161-167.