What’s a Rubric?

Ok, so we hear the word “rubric” every time we talk about assessment - and every time we read something about assessment. So what is it, and what does it do?

A rubric is an articulated plan for the evaluation of a specific learning objectives – put more simply, a rubric provides a set of performance levels by which we can evaluate achievement of any given topic.

Why use a rubric? It’s a win-win situation. A well designed rubric can make your life easier – as well as clarifying your expectations in regard to student performance on any given student learning objective.

How about an example?

Stated learning objective: “The student will produce a portfolio containing work (authentic artifacts) that demonstrates overall mastery of the use of widgets (the subject area).”

To measure the students’ ability to meet this learning objective, clear expectations of “mastery” must be articulated. Here is a possible way to design a rubric for this learning objective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Widgits</strong></th>
<th><strong>Exceptional</strong></th>
<th><strong>Adequate</strong></th>
<th><strong>Inadequate</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear command of the use of widgits as a key element in all artifacts included in the portfolio. Multiple uses of widgits as an integral feature of work. Demonstrated application of excellent technique.</td>
<td>Acceptable utilization of widgits predominates the artifacts included in the portfolio. Use of widgits to create overall design is present. Technique is appropriate for level of included work.</td>
<td>Widgits are not a key feature of the portfolio. Simplistic, one-dimensional work is primary method of expression. Lack of technique exhibited in selected artifacts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idea then, is to articulate clearly expectations – this is how you and your students will know when they can do what they have been taught to do.

Curious? Intrigued? Ready to try your hand? Check out this site for those who have already designed some workable rubrics in many subject areas….

“**The Rubric Builder**”
Beyond Confusion: An Assessment Glossary

This feature is the fourth in a series designed to clarify common assessment terminology.

Qualitative Assessment — Collects data that does not lend itself to quantitative methods but rather to interpretive criteria.

Quantitative Assessment — Collects data that can be analyzed using quantitative methods.

Direct Assessment — Gathers evidence, based on student performance, which demonstrates the learning itself. Can be value added, related to standards, qualitative or quantitative, embedded or not, using local or external criteria. Examples: most classroom testing for grades is direct assessment (in this instance within the confines of a course), as is the evaluation of a research paper in terms of the discriminating use of sources. The latter example could assess learning accomplished within a single course or, if part of a senior requirement, could also assess cumulative learning.

Indirect Assessment — Gathers reflection about the learning or secondary evidence of its existence. Example: a student survey about whether a course or program helped develop a greater sensitivity to issues of diversity.

— Dr. Andrea Leskes, Vice President for Education and Quality Initiatives of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

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Did you know...

News from the 2001 Alumni Survey of Baccalaureate Graduates

♦ 91% of our baccalaureate graduates would recommend NIU to their friends and family
♦ the average baccalaureate graduate reported salary (one year after graduation) was $33,207
♦ graduates overwhelmingly (92%) have a high opinion of their bachelor’s degree major
♦ in regard to the general education skills they learned at NIU, our graduates indicated that they were pleased with their skill levels in the areas of:
  • Critical thinking (81%)
  • Defining and solving problems (86%)
  • Thinking analytically – making logical inferences, and reaching correct conclusions (80%)
  • Speaking effectively (77%)
  • Writing effectively (78%)
♦ Using computers (79%)
♦ Getting along with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures (75%)
♦ according to 95% of NIU baccalaureate graduates, they received their degree in a reasonable amount of time
♦ most (78%) of NIU graduates report that their current job is directly related to their bachelor’s degree major
♦ 88% of baccalaureate graduates feel that their NIU degrees prepared them well for their job
♦ when asked about their plans regarding continuing their education, 80% of baccalaureate graduates are pursuing a master’s degree
♦ 92% consider their college years as time well spent

Learn more by contacting Assessment Services!
Office, reached its current iteration through much discussion and the perceived need for a cohesive assessment plan that includes the central, university-wide assessment initiatives currently in operation, as well as proposed initiatives in the areas of general education, technology skills assessment, multicultural assessment, and quantitative skills assessment. The end goal of this kind of plan is to present a “snapshot” of the NIU student body, incorporating available information and proposed information (as available) into a format that can be reviewed and assessed, and acted upon. The graphic below depicts the proposed plan:
NIU is proud that a number of presentations have been accepted for inclusion in the Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI) 2003 Assessment Institute. Scheduled for November 2-4, the conference is designed to aid practitioners and scholars in the pursuit of excellence in the assessment process. Originally started in 1992, the Midwest conference has grown to pull attendees from all over the Midwest to participate in a straight-forward, no-nonsense, practical format that encourages interaction and the trading of “workable” assessment plans and associated research. Presenters and topics include:

J. Daniel House and Craig A. Barnard; An Assessment of Factors Associated with Student Matriculation and College Choice

Ken Elliott; Preparing Assessors of Multi-Section Courses to Consistently Apply Learning Outcomes Assessment Rubrics to Student Work

J. Daniel House and Shevawn Eaton; A CHANCE to Succeed: A Comprehensive Assessment of Special Admission and Developmental Education

In the spring of 2004, a number of Northern presenters have been honored with presentation acceptances at the 6th annual Pacific AssessNet International Conference. Participants in this conference come from across the world to learn practical assessment practices. Those presenting include:

Sally Wakefield and Craig A. Barnard; Serving Two Masters: External (AACSB-International) and Internal (The University) Agents for Assurance of Learning

J. Daniel House, Beiling Xiao, and Craig A. Barnard; Longitudinal Assessment of Factors Influencing Student Matriculation

Congratulations to all!

The Office of Assessment Services assists NIU academic programs, learning centers and student services units in developing their assessment plans. Its mission statement focuses on excellence and continuous quality improvement.

Assessment Presentations Accepted for Conferences

Dan House and Shevawn Eaton are pleased that their presentation was accepted.