In this issue:

Student Peer Assessment
Seven Steps to Fair Assessment
Sally Wakefield, College of Business
The Non-Returning Student Survey
Contributions Solicited!
Is Pre-test / Post-test a Good Assessment Practice?
Who Can I Contact if I Want to Know More About..?
NIU Hosts One-Day Conference/Workshop

SHARPEN YOUR PENCIL
Student Peer Assessment

*Stephan Bostock* (December 2000) reports many advantages from the use of student peer assessments in higher education. Both the student assessors and those being assessed can benefit from the process while they are enrolled in a specific course where it’s used and as preparation for life-long learning. The process of peer assessment encourages student autonomy and higher level thinking skills, which can improve the quality of learning. It can also empower learners by engaging them in the selection of performance criteria and the evaluation of other students’ work.

Among the many benefits cited in Bostock’s article are:

- Improving students’ motivation by giving them a sense of ownership in the learning process
- Increasing the amount of feedback students receive about their work
- Encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning
- Using the process as a model for the internal self-assessment of performance
- Applying disciplinary knowledge to specific situations
- Engaging students as members of a community of scholars
- Providing the opportunity for transferable skills that can be used in professional life
- Fostering “deep” learning

Any disadvantages that can arise from the use of student peer assessment can be addressed by clearly defined learning outcomes, the preparation of students to engage in the process, the use of multiple assessors for each assignment, and a guarantee of anonymity for both the assessors and those being assessed. For additional information on the use of student peer assessment, including a case study and bibliography, see Bostock’s article online at [http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/cs/Stephen_Bostock/docs/bostock_peer_assessment.htm](http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/cs/Stephen_Bostock/docs/bostock_peer_assessment.htm)
Seven Steps to Fair Assessment

We all know that students learn in different ways and that faculty use many instructional strategies in their courses to help students learn. In a single course, students may encounter lectures, reading assignments, discussion, group work, examinations, written assignments, case study analysis, and online resources, to name a few. Is it any wonder that finding out what students have actually learned is such a challenge? This is the question that Linda Suskie addresses in her May 2000 article on fair assessment practices in the AAHEBulletin.com.

Suskie outlines seven steps to assist in making assessment a process in which all students can demonstrate what they’ve learned:

• Have clearly stated learning outcomes and share them with students so they know what to expect.
• Match your assessments with what you teach and vice versa.
• Use different measures and different kinds of measures.
• Help students learn to do the assessment task by giving detailed instructions and showing them examples of good work from previous classes.
• Engage and encourage students.
• Interpret assessment results appropriately by setting criterion or norm-referenced standards.
• Evaluate the outcomes of your assessments by reviewing students’ performance, assessment criteria, and teaching strategies.

For more details on these steps, other suggestions for ensuring that faculty use fair assessment practices, as well as a list of resources, see Suskie’s article at http://www.ahebulletin.com/public/archive/may2.asp?pf=1

PROFILES IN ASSESSMENT

Sally Wakefield, College of Business

This issue’s Profile in Assessment features Sally Wakefield, Assistant to the Dean in the College of Business (COB). Sally first arrived at NIU 1981. Her current work, among other important issues, concerns coordination of the COB’s assessment efforts, a task she finds richly rewarding. Sally was instrumental in preparing the College’s recent reaccreditation submission, which received exemplary marks from the AACSB accreditation review team. Learn more about the College of Business assessment process/program at http://www.cob.niu.edu/

Click either picture, above, to hear Sally Wakefield’s assessment philosophy. Windows Media Player is necessary to view these files. Download Windows Media Player for free.
The Office of Institutional Research and the Office of Assessment Services recently initiated a survey of non-returning students to seek data regarding the reasons successful (in good academic standing) students did not return for their second academic year. This survey assessed a number of facets of students’ experiences during their first year at NIU. It also examined the role those factors played in the decision to leave NIU.

Despite this decision, students expressed satisfaction with several aspects of their campus experience. Of those who responded:
- 82.1% of those who responded indicated that they were satisfied with NIU library resources and services
- 76.2% indicated that they were satisfied with the NIU Orientation Program
- 94.0% were satisfied with registration procedures at NIU
- 83.6% were satisfied with course scheduling and course availability

A variety of reasons influenced these students’ decision to leave NIU. Major findings included:
- 55.3% of the survey respondents indicated that they felt alone or isolated during their first year
- 40.3% indicated that roommate conflicts played a role in their decision to leave campus
- 70.1% of the former students indicated that their desire to transfer to another college was a factor in their decision to leave NIU

These results provide an initial assessment of factors that were considered by students when making their decision whether or not to return to NIU. This survey is planned to be an ongoing joint initiative, one of many more to come. For additional information on other IR activities, visit the IR website at http://ffsrv01.fifa.niu.edu/InstitutionalResearch/

Contributions Solicited!

Contribute to Toolkit’s newest feature, “Sharpen your Pencil: Assessment Tips from the Inside,” or any of our other regular features. We’re looking to share the wisdom that we each develop at home, making the work of assessment more productive. If you’d like material to be considered for inclusion in a future edition of Toolkit, submit a Word document of no more than 300 words as an email attachment to vcastidy@niu.edu.
Is Pre-test / Post-test a Good Assessment Practice?

FAQ: Is it good assessment practice to use a “pre-test/post-test model” to get student learning objective performance data?

The pre-test/post-test assessment model assumes that improvement occurs between the pretest and posttest. Any difference that is detected between the two points in time will be attributed to the material presented in the course in conjunction with out of class learning activities. The model can include repeated measures. For example, both teaching practice and student achievement can be measured repeatedly at predetermined intervals (for example, twice a year or annually). The pattern of change at different points in time can then be interpreted as a result of the intervention. If the pattern of student achievement shows an upward trend over time (say, several years) then one can interpret the trend as evidence of sustained effects of the course material/course experiences.

To get a longitudinal perspective, the pretest-posttest model can be implemented as a quasi-time-series model where repeated measures are taken over several years. For example, assessments can be conducted on an annual basis to identify longitudinal patterns and trends in student outcomes.

Typically, program outcomes and impact are measured longitudinally over several years. A consistently positive or upward trend can provide compelling evidence that the intervention is producing positive results.

It is, however, difficult to rule out completely the possibility that the positive trend is the result of some other factors (such as change in student population or change in teaching staff).

Implementation Steps
The pretest-posttest model is relatively easy to implement. Important steps include the following:
1. Decide what outcome(s) you want to measure
2. Select or develop instruments to collect the pertinent data
3. Decide whether sampling is needed
4. Administer the instruments to target groups at pretest time (for example, the beginning of semester)
5. Administer the instruments at posttest time (for example, the end of semester)
6. Analyze and interpret the evaluation data
7. Report findings to stakeholder groups
8. Use evaluation data for accountability and program improvement

Give the pre-test/post-test method a try in your assessment program!

Thanks to the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory for use of selected text.
ASSESSMENT BEST PRACTICES

Who Can I Contact if I Want to Know More About...

Electronic Portfolios: Developing a Culture of Evidence for Student and Institutional Learning
Susan Kahn, J. Hamilton, Anastasia S. Morrone, Howard R. Mzumura, Megan Palmer, Elizabeth J. Rubens; all at IUPUI

Designing a Program-Based Assessment Plan in the Humanities
Richard A. Gerber, New England Educational Assessment Network

Linking Classroom Outcomes Assessment and Academic Advising: Transitioning from Prerequisite to Outcomes Based Advising
Thomas J. Kopp, Joseph L. Rosetti; Siena College

—Selected from presentations at the 2004 Indiana University-Purdue University (IUPUI) Assessment Institute

PORTFOLIOS

NIU Hosts One-Day Conference/Workshop

NIU’s Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center will offer a conference on portfolio integration from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Friday, March 4, in the Holmes Student Center.

This conference is for anyone interested in portfolio integration for learning and engage in lively discussion sessions and generate ideas and share common experiences.

Kathleen Blake Yancey, the R. Roy Pearce Professor of Professional Communication at Clemson University, is the keynote speaker. Her most current book, “Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice,” is a study of how we help students become members of a reading public.

Registration includes refreshments, lunch, choice of conference sessions, and demonstrations and exhibits. For further information about the conference and presenters, visit http://www3.niu.edu/facdev/conference/portfolio.htm or call 753-0595.

Toolkit is brought to you by the Office of Assessment Services:

Donna Askins, Editor-in-Chief
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