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Program assessment can assist the development of curricula based on students' ability to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in college to new situations. Performance assessment determines learning by means of actual execution of tasks representative of learning goals. It helps in answering the faculty's question, "Are students learning what we think we are teaching them?" The article examines various types of performance assessment used in professional programs at Kean College of New Jersey.

Performance Assessment in Professional Majors

Within the last decade, many colleges and universities have become interested in measuring the aggregate knowledge and skills acquired by students in their academic majors. *Campus Trends 1990*, published by the American Council on Education, estimates that more than 82 percent of U.S. colleges and universities currently have some form of program assessment underway. Many of these efforts focus on the accumulation of content knowledge, facts and information that can be readily recalled and retrieved by individuals. Pen and pencil tests are the traditional assessment instruments for this type of information.

Recently, employers have expressed mounting dissatisfaction with the level of competencies exhibited by recent college graduates. This has caused many institutions of higher education to realize the importance of the systematic evaluation of students' ability to apply acquired skills rather than merely to measure their knowledge. Refocusing on the application of knowledge and skills has prompted the movement in higher education toward the development of curricula that emphasize competency, or the mastery of skills and their application to new situations, rather than the mastery of content.

Performance-based assessment is an effective method of measuring these competencies. It is a means of determining learning through the actual execution of tasks representative of our learning goals. The assessment instrument becomes the performance rather than a more traditional pen and paper test. Kean College of New Jersey has developed this mode

of assessment as a way of evaluating program effectiveness and bringing about program improvement. By measuring students' performances within each major or during specific points in the students' academic careers, Kean College professors are more capable of addressing the question, "Are our programs appropriately designed so as to help students learn what we think we are teaching them?" This article describes two professional majors at Kean College in which program assessment is systematically used.

Performance Assessment

There are two principal types of performance assessments—prepared performances and simulated performances. In prepared performances, students prepare their presentation in advance and perform it in front of one or more assessors. The assessor makes a judgment about the student's competence on the basis of the performance. The primary objective in prepared performances is to assess the student's level of competence in technical or physical skills. Simulated performances entail the reproduction of real life situations in order to demonstrate a learner's specific level of competence in managing the situation. Activities may include work samples, simulations, role playing, oral interviews, or group discussions. The assessors may be present at the performance or may view it on a videotape. The simulations should reflect a wide range of real-life characteristics, and the assessment should be geared to specific preestablished learning outcomes and performance standards.

Assessment of the Teacher of the Handicapped Program

Faculty members in the Teacher of the Handicapped Program at Kean College determined that they wanted to have cognitive and affective information about their students as well as information about potential teaching behaviors. They further decided to use assessment in individual courses and practicum experiences rather than in a culminating senior seminar course or during an "Assessment Day." Proceeding in this manner provided a means for continual monitoring of both the students' progress and program effectiveness, with the option of making program changes to meet student needs. The model for program assessment they selected included attitude surveys, writing samples, and a variety of simulated exercises that were to be administered in specific courses.

Originally, the first assessment tool in the Teacher of the Handicapped major was a writing sample, designed to assist students in formulating their positions on the critical issues in special education. Students drafted their positions on critical issues, analyzed these opinions based on readings and research, compared and contrasted the information gained, and then reexamined their original position. Faculty members reviewed each student's written work, using indicators identified by the assessment team, such as the student's ability to analyze, express opinions, summarize, compare and contrast, relate to scholarly works, and ability to suggest a recommended course of action for each of the issues.

After analysis of the results, it was decided that this exercise was more appropriate for students who were further advanced in the major. The writing sample therefore became the assessment method in a higher-level course.

A traditional assessment instrument—a pen and pencil survey—was selected to determine the students' attitudes toward handicapped individuals. This attitude survey was administered twice to all students in the same course, once at the beginning and once at the end. Since the focus of outcomes assessment at Kean is on program improvement and not individual student performance, faculty members have decided that this instrument need only be administered to a random sample of students.

The question of assessing student teachers in the Teacher of the Handicapped Program presented several problems for the faculty. Videotaping student teachers in the classroom—a type of prepared performance—is the generally accepted method of assessing student teachers. The Teacher of the Handicapped faculty rejected this method as unworkable because of the wide variety of placements in which their students complete student teaching. The problem was also compounded because students with handicaps often tend to react negatively to the video camera. In addition, it is often difficult to obtain permission from school districts to videotape handicapped children. Different instruments were subsequently developed to assess both teachers of the profoundly mentally handicapped as well as teachers in a resource room.

As an alternative to the generally accepted prepared performance as a means of assessing the behavior, beliefs, and competency of student teachers, faculty in the Teacher of the Handicapped Program decided to use a simulated exercise based on the work of Milward and Gerlach (1985) as a means of gathering information without using an objective exam. Two separate, but related exercises—including a variety of simulated performances—were developed to assess the following skills:

1. *Planning and Organizing*: Establishing a course of action for self and others to achieve a specific goal. Planning appropriate time, resources, setting, and sequence of activities for task accomplishment.
2. *Problem Analysis*: Identifying issues or problems; securing relevant information; identifying causes of problems; relating, comparing, or quantifying data from various sources.
3. *Strategic Decision Making*: Developing alternative courses of action, making decisions, and setting goals when time for deliberation is available.
4. *Tolerance for Stress*: Performing with stability under pressure or opposition; maintaining attention on multiple tasks or activities.
5. *Initiative*: Actively attempting to influence events to achieve goals; taking action beyond what is necessarily called for; self-starting.

"The First Day on the Job" was the first exercise developed and implemented. Selected seniors involved in student teaching are given a set of documents to read as though they were on their first day on the job. They are asked to read each document and categorize it as follows:

- Top priority—needs immediate action;
- Important—make sure to follow up on it;
- Needed information—file for future use or questions when appropriate;
- Trash it!—of no use/no questions or follow-up needed.

A second set of simulated performances was developed for the evaluation of potential teacher behaviors. This set consists of four 20-minute simulation exercises and include: classroom vignettes, referrals, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and case studies.

The classroom vignette is a simulated performance in which the student teacher is actually teaching a prepared lesson in a scenario where classmates act as handicapped students. The vignette is videotaped. Teaching methods, classroom management skills, and teacher attitudes are the primary skills evaluated through these simulations.

The remaining exercises in this set could be classified as simulated work samples. In the referral simulation, participants read a sample of a student's file and then decide whether or not the student should be referred to a facility outside the district or at least outside the school building. The participant must be able to justify this referral decision to supervisors and to parents.

In the IEP simulation, participants are given several sets of IEP samples and are told to select one. The student reviews the IEP and determines whether or not the sample includes all components required by the Rules and Regulations of the State of New Jersey. They are also told to identify at least two weaknesses of the sample and state at least three specific suggestions for improving it. Participants are also requested to detail suggestions for strategies, techniques, activities, media, and materials.

In the case study, participants are given a sample case study of a handicapped student. They review the case study, and based on the goals and objectives of the course, they develop at least one cognitive goal, one cognitive objective and/or one affective goal, and one affective objective.

Faculty members in the Teacher of the Handicapped Program at Kean have found that this combination of traditional pen and pencil instruments and the more innovative performance instruments are appropriate methods of assessing the learner's knowledge, attitudes, and ability to perform and to apply learning. The combination also assesses flexibility, problem-solving ability and creativity, as well as levels of self-confidence in novel situations.

Assessment of the Communications Program

Assessment of the Communications Program has been concerned primarily with students' attitudes and performance. The two major assessment instruments employed have been surveys and simulated performances. The surveys focus on the affective domain. Students, faculty, and alumni are asked to rate various aspects of the program. They are also asked to consider to what degree a list of stated goals are a part of

the program and what goals should be a part of the program. This rating is based on degree of importance. Information gathered from these questionnaires helps faculty determine how well the program is preparing students for careers as well as about how well the program is meeting students' needs. Recommendations about program requirements, student advisement, facilities, and support services are made based on an analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires.

Simulated performances have played a critical role in the assessment of acquired skills. In the original assessment effort, randomly selected seniors were given the topic of condom advertising on broadcast media. They were given thirty minutes to write a letter to a member of Congress opposing condom advertising on radio or television. They were then given twenty minutes to prepare a five-minute speech to a local church group advocating condom advertising. The third part consisted of dividing the students into groups, which were asked to role play the staff of a local television station who must reach consensus about whether or not to accept condom advertising on the station. Both the short speeches and the groups were videotaped.

At first, three faculty members individually evaluated the writings and the tapes based on detailed ratings of critical thinking, public speaking, writing, and group skills. This process was too cumbersome and detailed. Evaluation forms were streamlined and evaluation became a group process by which faculty members had to achieve consensus on a four-point scale assessing the criteria of writing, oral communication, group skills, and critical thinking. Further, results from the alumni questionnaire revealed that public speaking was not a major requisite in the field. The speech was replaced with a five-minute report to the station manager on the staff's decision following the group meeting.

The current assessment model, adopted by faculty in the Communications Program as the permanent one, has been revised accordingly. Students are now given a choice of topics. In addition to condom advertising, recent topics include the controversial author Salman Rushdie. Students are asked, as managers of an independent bookstore, to decide whether to stock, sell, and display Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. The writing assignment asks each student to justify a decision to employees. The group exercise consists of role playing the staff of a television station who must decide whether to invite a group of writers to discuss the controversy in the face of threats of terrorism and violence. The oral communication element involves each student reporting the group's decision to the station manager.

At the onset, students are apprised that faculty evaluations of the written exercises, the videotaped simulations, and the role playing exercises are based on the following:

- Basic understanding of mass media in the United States
- Critical thinking ability
- Ability to analyze audiences and adapt messages to them
- Persuasive ability—implementation of sound persuasion principles
- Ability to support arguments

- Flexibility of thinking
- Argumentation skills
- Ability to analyze issues
- Ability to tailor written and oral material to a specific audience
- Basic writing skills
- Small group communication skills
- Leadership skills in small groups
- Ability to perform needed roles in small groups
- Listening skills
- Public speaking/reporting out skills

The major impact of the successful combination of the surveys and simulated performances has been to allow communications faculty to evaluate effectively the program itself. Although they are not concerned with individual achievement, the intention of the assessment effort is to determine the ability of the program to provide students with that degree of skill deemed necessary for initial employment in the communications field.

Assessment Impact on Programs

The assessment process in general has served as the catalyst for program improvement. In the Teacher of the Handicapped Program, setting goals and objectives prompted professors to begin standardizing assignments, textbooks, and teaching methods in different sections of the same course. In the Communications Program, professors discovered, while setting goals and objectives, the need to emphasize critical thinking, speaking or reporting out, and writing skills. Accordingly, each course has been modified to incorporate these skills. Faculty in the Teacher of the Handicapped Program, in response to the goal of computer literacy for all majors, developed a course devoted totally to computer technology for the handicapped.

Analysis of data received from assessment exercises motivated curricular revisions. In the Communications Program, faculty and alumni questionnaires indicated that ethics is considered an important area of learning. Faculty are now developing ethics components for incorporation into each course in the department. These same surveys demonstrated a need for graduating students to be sensitive to people of all cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds as well as to people with different attitudes, values, and beliefs. Faculty members are now working on a methodology for integrating discussions of sexism, racism, and stereotyping into all courses.

The writing exercises in the assessment instrument revealed performance weaknesses in this area for communications majors. Writing skills are now being emphasized in all courses in the department. A common stylebook is required for use by each major in all communications courses. For each written assignment, a standardized form indicates any critical thinking and writing problems along with stylebook violations.

Feedback from student and alumni surveys have shown that there seems to be a greater need for students to learn the skill of reporting out to managers, supervisors, etc., rather than public speaking skills *per se*. A procedure similar to that instituted for writing has been instituted for all speaking assignments. The procedure concentrates on techniques for reporting out. The faculty believes that this emphasis on writing and speaking skills has caused students to work more carefully.

The writing component of the assessment model for the Teacher of the Handicapped Program led faculty to the conclusion that it was more important to know the writing competence of students at the end of the program rather than at the beginning. Hence, a writing component was added to one of the advanced courses and removed from a beginning-level course.

In the Teacher of the Handicapped Program, a student attitude questionnaire revealed that students need to have specific information about children with special educational needs, as well as an awareness of critical issues in the field. In response to this, exercises for one course were designed to help students formulate positions, to analyze their opinions based on research and readings, to compare and contrast the information, and to reexamine their original position.

Correlation of student and faculty questionnaires from the Communications Program also revealed that students often did not realize they had learned concepts that professors had taught. They were not able to see the link from class to class or from course to course. Teaching methods have now been modified to review information from past classes and to preview new information to be taught in the current class.

Both student and alumni questionnaires identified advisement as a weakness in the Communications Department. As a result, the entire process was revamped. Faculty members now keep detailed files on students containing feedback forms from major courses. Faculty members work with advisees in correcting deficiencies, using a variety of available services. The faculty advisor also works with each student in setting specific goals for each semester. Progress toward achieving these goals is discussed at the next advisement session.

Communications Program questionnaires to students and alumni also indicated a desire for a better communication network within the department. A prototype departmental newsletter has been developed to accomplish this goal.

Concerns of Faculty Regarding Assessment

The assessment initiatives of both the Teacher of the Handicapped and the Communications Programs assess program effectiveness rather than student achievement. Both departments report that early in the process of developing the principles and policies under which assessment would take place, the faculty was reluctant to embark on this path. Faculty members were concerned that the results of the assessment effort would be used for evaluation of themselves and might be used as "gates" for

students, rather than for improvement of the programs. Additional questions were raised about the possibility of interference with the curriculum and with the college's mission, and of inappropriate comparisons among departments, schools, colleges, students, and faculty. Faculty also worried about ownership and use of assessment data, and were reluctant to become involved in assessment because it is so time consuming.

Assurances from the administration and from the faculty union convinced them that each department would control its results. Of equal importance were the facts that each department could set its own goals and objectives, design its own assessment instruments, and determine the use of the results. The task force responsible for creating the proposal for assessment at Kean responded to faculty concerns by developing a set of principles and an organizational structure, which reduced anxiety levels and resistance to change to an acceptable level. The process to reach this level of agreement took nine months. More detailed explanations are provided in *A Proposal for Program Assessment at Kean College of New Jersey* (1986), and *Improving Student Learning: The Outcomes Assessment Program* (Boyer, 1989).

The general concerns listed above and the specific concerns of each academic program were addressed as the program began its assessment activities. Responding to the legitimate concerns of faculty contributed to the development of an environment in which it was possible to examine all aspects of students' development without threat to them or to the program. This environment encouraged the type of creative responses developed by the faculty. In each department, there were also faculty members who were intrigued with the concept and who were willing to devote a greater amount of time to the process. Now "[t]he more people see how assessment benefits a program, the more they become committed to making it an ongoing process" (Remmers and Londino, p. 51).

The increased involvement of faculty in the assessment effort for both the Communications and the Teacher of the Handicapped Programs is due to a variety of factors. The consensus achieved in the goal setting phase has led to a feeling of camaraderie among colleagues. In the Communications Program, faculty members not formally involved in developing a method for integrating discussions on diversity into all courses have collaborated by sharing their experiences of approaches that do and do not work. Professors in all core courses for the Teacher of the Handicapped Program have accepted the responsibility to emphasize key concepts taught in other courses by colleagues.

Faculty members have become aware of the articulation in the curriculum from course to course. The emphasis of the Communications Program on the integration of writing and speaking skills into all major courses has made all faculty members jointly responsible for their students' learning.

Another essential component of the assessment effort has been communication between programs. For faculty members in both departments, the sharing of ideas in an open, honest environment has fostered respect for the ideas of others. The willingness of program

participants to share their stories, ideas, and experiences—their successes and their failures—is representative of virtually every program on the Kean campus.

Faculty involvement in assessment has also contributed significantly to confidence in program quality. Programs of quality are the product of a natural evolution of the assessment process. Both departments have taken a hard look at the quality of their individual programs. Careful planning, rigorous reporting policies, and systematic implementation of procedures have enhanced the quality of their programs in the areas of student learning and development, student satisfaction, and program and curricular development and improvement.

Kean College, in general, and the Communications and Teacher of the Handicapped Programs, in particular, have used the assessment process to propagate individual and group faculty satisfaction and renewal. In turn, this renewal has been used to build for the future. Through the assessment process, departmental energy has been redirected toward program improvement, which advances the goal of a quality education. For Kean College the assessment of student outcomes has become essential to the improvement of student learning and development, program improvement, and ensuring that the institution provides a quality education for all.

Suggested Readings

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