

Next Term will be Better!

Summer is a time instructors frequently consider updating their courses. Reflection and assessment can improve our teaching and our students' learning. When we reflect on a course, we may realize something needs to change. Unfortunately, exactly what should change is not always evident. Insights may occur when we look beyond traditional measurement of content. The spring 1997 issue of the Journal on Excellence in Teaching discusses generic strategies that can be modified to apply to any discipline. Initially, many faculty members find it helpful to choose relatively few aspects of a strategy.

Faculty may exclusively emphasize content requirements when their instruction would benefit from including assessment of other aspects of learning. Summary rubrics were developed as a portion of a continuous assessment plan in a model described by Hammons, Fallon, Brown, and Wann (1997). The authors recommend indicating clearly in the syllabus the relationship between course goals and objectives as well as the performance standards reflected in the rubrics. Each area describes four skill levels and includes specific information reflecting the attainment of skills at each level. For example, the general rubric for content assigns only one point if the student "demonstrates severe misconceptions about the concepts and generalization" (p.38). Two points are awarded for incomplete understanding while a score of three reflects a complete, accurate understanding of important concepts. The requirements for a score of four are: "demonstrates a thorough understanding of the important concepts or generalizations and provides new insights into some aspect of that information" (p.38). These rubrics, designed to be incorporated throughout the curriculum, address six areas:

- Content (understands concepts)
- Performance (performs important strategies and skills)
- Reflection (determines types of information necessary for tasks and seeks out information)
- Growth and development (seeks out and completes challenging tasks)
- Communication (masters skills necessary for oral or written presentations)
- Collaboration (identifies and achieves group goals)

Similarly, a second article provides a guide for assessing potential problems in the classroom. Included are concrete questions for the instructor with research sources and possible strategies in 22 areas. For example, in the "Check Learning Objectives" area, Duffy, Duffy, and John (1997) ask the instructor to reflect on whether present objectives match long-term goals as well as activities and assessments to provide information for making course adjustments. The research sources provide references that present information on learning objective preparation. Possible strategies for checking learning

objectives include using quantitative and qualitative student questionnaires to assess the level of effectiveness in meeting learning objectives during the early weeks of the term and regularly reviewing the course objectives throughout the term (p.13).

Duffy et al. suggest assessments may have different functions throughout the course. Some may be most useful during the first week (student background knowledge), whereas others are beneficial at midterm (student comprehension) or the final weeks (student cognitive development). These authors view assessment from four perspectives:

- Classroom community (student perspective and classroom atmosphere)
- Students (student cognitive development, background knowledge, and learning preferences)
- Course content (learning objectives, presentation styles, and student comprehension)
- Professors (preparation) (p.6-7)

In addition, Duffy et al. provide 65 teaching and learning references. These articles expand the concept of assessment to incorporate information beyond content knowledge. Copies can be requested through interlibrary loan on the College of DuPage library website. Would your courses improve if you included some of these ideas in your planning?

References

Duffy, D., Duffy, J., John, J. (1997). Tuning up your class: Using Assessment for Optimal Student Performance. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*. Vol. 8, No. 2, pages 3-20.

Hammons, J., Fallon, M., Brown, S., Wann, J. (1997). Continuous Assessment Plans: A Model for Implementation. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*. Vol. 8, No: 2, pages 21-40

Marianne Hunnicutt
Coordinator
Innovation Incubator
IC 3067c
College of DuPage
425 Fawell Blvd.
Glen Ellyn, IL 605137
(630) 942-4306
hunnicut@cdnet.cod.edu