

EXAM CRIB SHEETS: ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PREPARATION

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ABSTRACT

Although the use of a "crib sheet" (student notes for use during an exam) is hardly a new idea, a perusal of the literature revealed no related research on its efficacy. What has been reported is research on potential advantages and disadvantages of "open-book" and/or "open-note" tests [1, 2, 3]. One well-recognized benefit of open-note and open-book tests is a reduction in test anxiety by students [3].

A team taught "integrated business curriculum" course allowed students to use a crib sheet on essay exams. The intent was to lessen the memorization load of students, and facilitate use of more conceptual and application type questions by the instructors. Traditionally, a formula sheet was provided by the instructor(s) for finance-oriented questions. The last exam of the semester and the following semester, crib sheets were used on an experimental basis. Students received little direction on preparation other than they must be hand-written and limited to both sides of an 8½" by 11" page.

The authors collected students' crib sheets on two occasions – 18 weeks separated. A content analysis of the sheets is still in progress, but tentative themes are emerging. Some student's transferred information from lecture verbatim to the sheets, whereas others translated the material into their own words. It appears that those who translated data into their own voice performed better on the essay exam. A variety of organization and layouts were displayed. Some student's didn't appear to have any organization, whereas others organized by topic or speaker. Following an organization process appears to enhance student's thoughts by displaying a better understanding of the concept. Quantity alone does not appear to be related to performance. Organization and writing size influences quantity. Many students tried to predict which concepts would be covered and gave more space to those, while not covering other concepts. Faculty assumed students would integrate topics displaying cross-functionality. Unfortunately, few (if any) of the students were able to display integration. After employing a crib-sheet system for six exams, the faculty team is mixed on its efficacy. Some believe when they are used wisely (i.e., material integrated, organized), crib sheets resulted in greater learning and higher test scores. Others believe valuable study time was diverted into preparation of the sheets. Similarly, the crib-sheets appeared to have beneficial effects for some material (i.e., exam questions), but not for other types. They appear to have facilitated learning of qualitatively-oriented material. Additional analysis needs to be completed prior to making recommendations.

REFERENCES

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