

# **COURSE EMBEDDED ASSESSMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper identifies a technique for addressing course embedded assessment. Course-embedded assessment is a technique or collection of assessment techniques that allow faculty to evaluate and improve approaches to instruction and course design in a way that is built into and a natural part of the teaching-learning process. The setting is an MBA course. The concept, course embedded assessment, is defined; the technique, generalizable to a variety of courses and subjects, is described; and a generic measurement tool is identified.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Assessment: The final frontier?...at least it seems that way. Many of our colleagues have had to deal with the assessment issue in one or more of our capacities: professor, administrator, or member of an accreditation team. Assessment seems like the final frontier because it is generally the last thing we think about as professors developing our courses. As administrators preparing accreditation documents, assessment seems that illusive discovery just beyond our grasp. And, as members of an accreditation team, we find a safe and familiar harbor when we praise all accomplishments, lament the resource constraints, and encourage the continued search for better assessment measures. This paper identifies a technique for addressing course embedded assessment. The setting is an MBA course. The concept, course embedded assessment, is defined; the technique, generalizable to a variety of courses and subjects, is described; and a generic measurement tool is identified.

### **Definition**

Course-embedded assessment is a technique or collection of assessment techniques that allow faculty to evaluate and improve approaches to instruction and course design in a way that is built into and a natural part of the teaching-learning process. Techniques may be used for grading classroom assignments that are evaluated to assign students a grade. These techniques may assess individual student performance or aggregate the data to provide information about the course or program. These techniques can be formative or summative, quantitative or qualitative. It is important to note however that course embedded assessments are uniquely different than pre-test, post-test approach that passes as a rather unimaginative albeit traditional measure of learning assessment.

## **THE STUDY**

### **Learning Objectives**

Four overarching learning objectives derived from AACSB International standards are incorporated into the MBA course syllabus. The syllabus proceeds to outline the connection between the content and activities in the course and the MBA program learning objectives. An initial level of assessment relates

to external validity; that is the extent to which the course content is appropriately matched with course content at other institutions and is appropriate to industry and practitioner expectations. This is easily accomplished by selecting some comparative institutions or more appropriately an institution one aspires to be like and reviewing these syllabi. In this case the course pedagogy and content parallel a second year MBA course at the Wharton School.

### **Teaching-Learning Process**

Learnings' essays linking specific course content with one or more of the overarching learning objectives are assigned at various times during the course. The generic form of these essay topics require students to link several selected assigned readings with class discussions, cases and other learning activities. Students are instructed to find the linkages among these and one or more of the overarching learning objectives identified in the syllabus. Students are cautioned to focus on the linkages and avoid the temptation to simply review the assigned materials.

### **Method**

The learnings' essay topics are set to reflect concepts discussed during the first, second, third, and fourth quarter of the class with the specific requirement that students relate these concepts (and related readings) to one or more of the overarching objectives. While not a necessary pre-condition, the class is divided (randomly) into four groups. Each student in group one writes the first essay, group two the second essay and so on. This technique means that the instructor (in a 40 student class) is reading eight to twelve essays at any given time; therefore, more feedback, often focusing on the positive, can be provided more quickly. And, as the essays represent a 25 percent sample of the class, the instructor can respond generally to the class if after reading the essays it appears that some concepts may be underrepresented or misapplied to the overarching objectives. This is one of the obvious benefits associated with this technique and a sampling approach...mid-course not post-course corrections are easily made and can be documented.

### **Measurement**

Reading the essays also reflects the capacity for student learning. By the examples students use in their essays to illustrate learnings, the instructor gains insight into their dominant learning styles. (See: Buckingham, "What Great Managers Do," HBR, March 2005.) One measurement mechanism that works quite well is an adaptation of Bloom's Taxonomy. There are six major categories in the cognitive domain and the theory suggests that a lower level domain must be mastered before the next level of learning can take place. Each essay is given a score from 1 to 6 reflecting lowest to highest domains: remembering; understanding; applying; analyzing; evaluating; creating.

## **RESULTS AND EXTENSION**

In a recent MBA course taught (Summer 2009), scores on students' learnings' essays ranged from 3.5 to 4.8 on Bloom's adapted scale. This means that students demonstrated an ability to deconstruct conceptual and theoretical models into their component parts to see interrelationships, view actions systemically, and make appropriate connections to the four learning objectives. MBA courses are offered in both a traditional, semester based on campus setting as well as off campus locations relying in some aspect of distance learning support. Often within the assessment domain the question is posed concerning the similarity in learning outcomes. Collecting these scores for each of the same courses

taught at different locations enables between/among course comparisons and a rank order of all classes. For each of the locations in which multiple sections of the course have been taught in recent years, the average score was calculated and the courses ranked (one being best or highest score). These are the average ranks for courses in each program location: Location A=3.5; Location B=5.2; Location C=8.3; Location D=12.2.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper identified a technique for developing course embedded assessment. In his course the author also includes team presentations and a course long simulation in the embedded assessment process. The latter two are outside the scope of this paper; however, they will be discussed briefly during the paper presentation.

### **REFERENCES**

A full set of references are available from the author on request.