Using Assessment Tools for Blended or Face-to-Face Courses

Giving prompt feedback is one of the key principles in Chickering and Gamson's Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (1987). They state that reflection is critical to learning and "knowing what you know/don't know focuses learning." Students require feedback on performance before, during and after a learning experience.

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Why Use Assessment Tools?

In a recent study on course redesign, Twigg (2003) indicated that learning management systems, such as Blackboard, can increase student opportunities for feedback and assessment. At the same time these systems can decrease the amount of time that faculty and teaching assistants spend on preparing assessment activities and on grading, recording and posting results. Traditional assessment approaches in large introductory courses often involve only a midterm and final examination. But when you use an assessment tool, you can automate components of the assessment and feedback process enabling both repetition (student practice) and frequent feedback. Research has consistently proven that repetition and feedback enhance learning.

You can regularly test students on assigned readings and homework using online quizzes designed to probe their preparedness and conceptual understanding. These brief quizzes motivate students to keep on top of the course material, help structure how they study, and encourage them to spend more time on the task at hand. Using online quizzes encourages a "do it until you get it right" approach because students are allowed to take the quizzes many times over until they master the material. These types of online activities provide consistent, automated grading across sections and allow for instant feedback for students when they are concentrating on the task.

Learning management systems contain a number of tools that can be used effectively and efficiently to provide students with many opportunities for feedback and assessment. These tools include the:

- Test Manager
- Survey Manager
- Pool Manager
- Gradebook
- Course Statistics

Give Me an Example

Create three to four questions related to the content of a pre-lecture reading assignment (e.g., textbook chapter, online article). One question asks students to identify what they did not understand about the reading and what they would like you to cover within the lecture.

Create an online quiz from these questions using a tool such as the Blackboard Test Manager. Deploy the quiz before the lecture, tabulate the results using a tool such as Blackboard's Gradebook Tool, and post the results to the course site prior to the lecture. Give students a mark for completing the online self-assessment quiz and discuss the related quiz questions and issues in the lecture.

More Ideas

- Before class, use a tool such as the Blackboard Survey Manager to survey students about their opinions or preferences regarding a particular topic, issue or question.

- During class, use a tool such as the Blackboard Learning Management System to display and discuss:

  - Pre-lecture quiz and survey results.

  - Previous student course assignments.

  - Learning objects, such as multimedia animations or video clips that illustrate course concepts.

- After class, you can use a variety of tools to continue the assessment process, such as:

  - A survey management tool, such as Blackboard Survey Manager, to conduct reflective end-of-the-week surveys for students (i.e., what was your key learning "take-away," what was your "muddiest point").

  - An online test management tool, such as Blackboard Test Manager, to create a pool of self-assessment questions for student practice outside of class.

  - An online discussion tool, such as Blackboard Online Discussion, to provide a forum for frequently asked questions related to course concepts.

Other Considerations

Get your students involved in the assessment process by creating opportunities for them to develop their own review questions and assess each other's work. Be sure that your assessment activities are congruent with the course learning outcomes and that these activities are designed to stimulate and assess critical thinking rather than just recall of information.

Where Can I Go for More Information?

1. **Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education**

   Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F. (1987). *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3-7.

   http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/7princip.htm

2. **Improving Learning and Reducing Costs: New Models for Online Learning**

   Twigg, C.A. (2003). *EDUCAUSE Review*, 38(5), 29-38.

   http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0352.pdf

3. **Just-In-Time Teaching**

   Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT) is a teaching and learning strategy that incorporates online assignments and student input into lectures, resulting in a more active learning environment.

   http://webphysics.iupui.edu/jitt/jitt.html

4. **Alternative Assessment in Higher Education: Web Sites for a Learner-Centered Approach**

   A list of Web-based resources from the American Library Association that describe a wide range of alternative assessment approaches.

   http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crlnews/backissues2004/november04/alternativeassessment.htm