Reclaiming Trust: Graduating All of Our Students

The annual conference sponsored by the Office of Minority Equity in Lansing was entitled "Equity Within the Classroom: Graduating Minority Students". Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States, reminded educators that public confidence in higher education was continuing to erode. He indicated that evidence of this decline in confidence seemed apparent across the nation: legislators are disillusioned with the quality and the cost of higher education: state appropriations have declined; there are numerous allegations questioning the authenticity of scholarly research; parents are appalled at costs; students are dissatisfied with programs and job outlook; and society is suspicious of the teachers that we produce. Newman concluded that higher education must recapture its role of moral and civic leadership in society and that higher education must be engaged in the social and intellectual transformation of students.

Nationally, we have witnessed the turmoil and social unrest which occurs when there is a lack of trust across racial lines. Reactions to the King verdict in Los Angeles were influenced by a lack of trust in our judicial system. In Michigan, Black students left Olivet College before the end of the term because they did not trust that the administration could protect them from physical harm. According to Frank Newman, we have a moral responsibility for children whose parents have placed a public trust in our public institutions. If these events were fueled by a lack of trust, how do we reestablish trust and provide an environment where the social and intellectual transformation of Black students can occur? Claude Steele of Stanford has indicated that in order to accomplish this no aspect of the Black experience in America in be devalued. We must embrace a paradigm in the academy which recognizes the diverse forms that excellence can take.

Providing an environment where students of diverse cultures and learning styles are better integrated into academic life is attainable. On many fronts Oakland has been a pioneer in improving the learning environment for minorities. The Academic Skills Center has provided study skills seminars, supplemental instruction, and tutoring which ultimately should reduce attrition and student dissatisfaction. The math department has continually supported programs which are designed to improve student achievement in mathematics courses. Student Affairs has implemented co-curricular activities which are designed for their cross-cultural appeal. Lastly, minorities comprise over eighteen percent of the University workforce, yet, only 4% of the faculty is black. Tinto, Astin, and Noel and Levitz have consistently noted that students' experiences are colored by the people that they encounter in institutions. We reestablish trust through the people that make up our institutions. Trust requires that we believe in the dignity and potential of all humankind. The conference "Equity Within the Classroom: Graduating Minority Students" provided many examples of how institutions are improving the graduation rates of minority students.

If Oakland is to achieve its goal of a culturally diverse campus, it is important that minority students perceive that they can expect full integration into the academic mainstream. The model upon which we continue to build has to provide the opportunity for our students to embrace diversity in order to become effective citizens in a pluralistic society.

--Virginia R. Allen, Editor

Portfolio Development as a Teaching and Learning Methodology

The use of a portfolio to document skills to a prospective employer traditionally has been used by many professions. The notion of using portfolios for individual student assessment of knowledge and/or skills in higher education is a relatively new idea. While elementary education specialists have frequently used portfolio or "notebook" projects, higher education and professional schools have primarily depended upon standardized testing as a means of assessment.

The focus of the November teaching/learning presentation and discussion was on the portfolio format which has been adopted as a teaching/learning and assessment methodology within a school of nursing. Through this assignment, students demonstrate integration of theoretical knowledge and psychomotor skills, document independent study, and are able to self evaluate achievement of course objectives. This method, in combination with other strategies, has facilitated an innovative approach to evaluation of a curriculum which requires theoretical and skill components for students with diverse learning styles.

Faculty discussion and student course evaluations indicated dissatisfaction with testing as a sole means of evaluation of student progress in a nursing course. While significant other work was required, such as preparation of clinical patient care plans and independent study modules, little "credit" was offered nor was attention given to learning styles of students. A variety of remedies had been attempted, but the majority only added extra work to the course and were designed to dilute the weight of tests in the calculation of a final grade. Portfolio development had been introduced as a means of assessment through the North Central accreditation process. This method was viewed as not only a solution to meeting the needs of grading, but also was a means to move to "value added" evaluation in addition to normed-referenced (standardized testing) methods of outcome assessment. Most importantly, it allowed faculty to meet the needs of diverse learners in the program.

After careful planning, the portfolio project was introduced to incoming sophomore level nursing students in fall 1990. Much the same way an artist selects work in a portfolio to display their range of techniques, nursing faculty assisted students to bring together assignments and projects to reflect their strengths and achievement in relationship to course objectives. Meaningful feedback, both written and oral, was given to students. Portfolio development was viewed as a method of evaluation that was flexible and evolving as program objectives and student need changed over time. The portfolio project has been quantitatively and qualitatively evaluated by both students and faculty. While feedback has been positive, there have been both problems and benefits associated with the project. These have been identified as:

A. Benefits

1. Portfolios build upon existing teaching, evaluation, and assessment activities and coordinates assignments.
2. It documents student learning and progress within a curriculum over time.
3. It provides for a method of documentation of independent learning.
4. Multiple methods for evaluation recognize diverse learning styles and overcome time and language limitations.
5. Self evaluation and reflection promotes learning.
6. It provides a means of demonstration for critical thinking about subject matter.

B. Problems

1. Students may be motivated for only a grade and do not recognize the value of self evaluation and reflection.
2. Faculty judgements related to student learning may not be consistent between raters.

3. A working consensus must be developed and agreed to among evaluators in terms of criteria and rating.
4. Faculty feedback to students may be limited due to time constraints.
5. The process of portfolio development takes time and effort to identify objectives and outcomes.

Portfolio-assisted assessment of student learning and program evaluation is at an early stage. While this project focused upon nursing education, the information is applicable to other curriculums that require links between cognitive knowledge and application of skills. Research in adult learning theory supports the use of multiple methods for evaluation since persons learn through a variety of methods. A portfolio has provided the mechanism to demonstrate this learning and assess a program of study.

--Patricia Ketcham

The Use of Simulation in Higher Education

Simulation is a versatile, interactive teaching/learning strategy. By definition, to simulate means "to have the appearance or form of, without the reality; counterfeit; imitate."[1] As a teaching/learning strategy simulation refers to a training method that represents reality very closely, yet allows the complexity of the situation to be controlled by the instructor.[2] In its pure form, simulation combines several teaching methods including; case studies, role playing, performance of psychomotor skills, and decision making.

Simulation is an appropriate method for many disciplines. In nursing for example, simulation may be used to facilitate teaching and learning of specific clinical skills in a particular patient care situation. To create reality a scenario or case study is provided. Based on the case study, the student interacts with pretend patient(s) and uses medical supplies and equipment to provide patient care. The student performs skills, interacts with the patient, and makes decisions as the situation and patient's condition change.

Medical disaster training is another area which relies heavily on simulation. Disaster drills utilize a variety of trauma case studies and multiple 'mock' trauma victims to provide realistic situations in which medical personnel may practice decision making and performance of psychomotor skills.

Health care disciplines are not the only ones to find simulation useful. Many other disciplines have found simulation or a modification of it helpful. For example, law students may conduct group counseling sessions. Law enforcement students may participate in simulated arrest and investigation scenarios.

No matter what the discipline, simulation allows the student to make decisions and react to the results of their decisions. Simulation provides an excellent means of bridging the gap between classroom theory and application of theory to the real world.
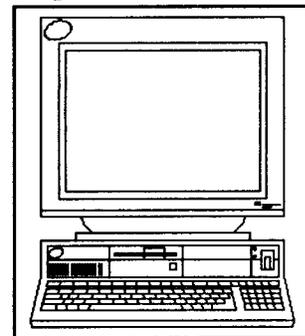
--Rose Utley

[1]Funk and Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary. Funk and Wagnalls Inc., New York, 1976, Vol. 2, p. 626

[2]Joyce B. Weil Models of Teaching, 2nd Ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall International, 1980, p. 295-300

Creating Unique Computerized Accounting Assignments

Accounting instructors are constantly challenged to make accounting assignments relevant to actual business experiences. Faculty strive to make assignments into useful experiences that explain the accounting process and facilitate student understanding of how financial statements are prepared and what information they contain. With the dramatic growth of computer use in business applications, students must become proficient with computers in order to compete in the workplace. Combining comprehensive accounting assignments with computer applications is one way faculty can accomplish these objectives.

While comprehensive accounting problems provide students with a better understanding of actual business applications, they carry with them intrinsic problems, regardless of whether they are done manually or on a computer. From the faculty's perspective, the complexity of longer

Is there a topic you'd like to see addressed in *Insights & Ideas*? Call or write Virginia Allen, 520 ODH; ext. 2190.

problems can make them difficult to draft, monitor and control. This work is seldom collected and reviewed by anyone other than the preparer because faculty face the question of whether to assign value to work when it is impossible to ascertain if the student completed the assignment independent of outside help.

One way to reduce the extra effort associated with the selection of new texts and homework, and still be able to reward student effort is to create a unique assignment for each class or even for each student, while maintaining a common problem framework. This University's faculty have developed such a project that is required of all accounting principles students. The assignment must be completed using a basic spreadsheet program (Lotus 123, Enable, VP Planner, etc.). The current assignment is the culmination of several years of work and many different versions that ranged from giving all students the same problem (adjusting dollar amounts each term), to the present version that produces a unique solution for each student based upon an individualized set of problem criteria.

The development of the master template is a relatively simple procedure. Using any spreadsheet program, an unadjusted trial balance is prepared, which can include as many accounts as desired. Data for preparing adjusting entries is then added. The template is completed by inputting the required financial statements and/or check figures for selected accounts.

To individualize each project, two random numbers are input at the top of each project. One or more random numbers are needed to create unique data for each project. The random numbers are used in two ways. They are used to numerically adjust (i.e., add to, subtract from, etc.) selected trial balance numbers to create unique amounts for accounts such as sales or ending inventory. Secondly, random numbers are used to identify each student's project. The random numbers are printed at the top of each page.

Once the master template is completed, a faculty member or student assistant can input random numbers to create and print as many projects as desired. Note that the master template needs to be created only once, unless the faculty desires to change the components of the project in the future. Revisions can be quickly and easily made without affecting the integrity of the assignment.

Since the accounting principles sections at this institution use common syllabi, examinations, and computer projects, the faculty divide the work for the semester among themselves. Usually one or two faculty members are assigned to coordinate the computer project each term.

The assignment requires that students develop a spreadsheet template and insert their unique data, including any adjusting entries that may be needed. Students must then submit print outs of their worksheet, financial statements and formula (by cell) that were used to create their output, as well as their computer diskettes. Students are normally allotted three to four weeks to complete the assignment.

The nature and response to this assignment accomplished the objectives established by the faculty, namely to reward student effort for comprehensive accounting problems without constraining the time to be used for the assignment or compromising the integrity of the problem itself. By adopting individualized computer projects, accounting faculty can lower the risk of student cheating, provide a comprehensive review of accounting applications, improve the student's knowledge of computers, and even reduce the student's educational costs by eliminating the need for outside practice sets. This assignment will continue to be a required component of the accounting principles course.

--Sandra Pelfrey
--Barbara Theisen