Using Technology to Assess Program Outcomes and Practices

Technology continues to be a useful and effective assessment tool which can be used to more successfully and accurately illustrate student learning and program outcomes across universities. Online surveys, course evaluations, and exams are incredible resources for collecting useful data on student learning and the meeting of course objectives.

Recently we in the Office of Institutional Assessment and Evaluation have worked with the Academic Assessment and Evaluation Committee (AAEC) for the Health Sciences to begin determining the imperative functions and current state of the software we are using for assessment and accreditation. We have collected data via the 2016 Howard University Health Sciences Software Utilization Survey which will assist us in determining the best practice for using cost effective and efficient standardized software throughout the Health Sciences. Not only are we using this survey to assess which software is being used in the Health Sciences, we are also assessing how the software is being used.

This is just one of the many exciting efforts being made to streamline assessment and evaluation here at Howard University. The 2016 Howard University Health Sciences Software Utilization Survey asked Health Sciences administrators and faculty to evaluate which software programs they utilized for assessment and evaluation. In our preliminary findings Blackboard, Examsoft, Survey Monkey, and E-Value were among the most popular software.

Normalizing the Use of Technology in the Digital Age

Technology continues to change and with that change comes new and exciting advances in assessment as well as new challenges. The balancing act of attempting to keep up with new modes of technology, such as online degree audit systems and online course evaluation systems, while still remaining committed to the assessment methods which have worked in the past is one that many universities face.

This environment of constant change and evolution is one that many of our students were born into. They are children of the Digital Age and the Facebook Generation. Millennials are constantly engaging with changing technology.
Using Student Learning Evidence to Improve!

A key first step in using assessments is to discuss and reflect on assessment practices within the institution or program to build a comprehensive, collective approach to assessing student learning.

Uses of student learning evidence for institution-level improvement include:

- Setting institutional priorities and strategic planning
- Informing institutional decision making
- Incorporating results into accreditation efforts
- Framing assessment at the institution level
- Revising institutional outcomes
- Improving student engagement and success

Use of student learning evidence for program and classroom-level improvement include:

- Setting faculty priorities
- Securing resources for professional development
- Improving student support services
- Revising curriculum, courses, and assignments
- Informing program reviews/departmental self-studies
- Aligning curriculum
- Improving program outcomes

Levels of Technology in Assessment

The evidence of student learning should be used for multiple levels of assessment. This also calls for multiple levels of technology. In the classroom, assessment is often used at the course level, but its usefulness can help better departmental programs and improve institutional effectiveness overall. As technologies evolve and change the ways in which we utilize and combine those technologies will also change. The paper and pencil model continues to be useful and effective for such things as course evaluations. Email blasts and poster campaigns have been useful tools in advertising for student and campus surveys. These varying technologies, from low to moderate to high technology, all have a place and a function in assessing program outcomes and practices.

Promising Ways to Assess Student Learning

To assess student learning, assessments may require students to perform a particular skill by writing or completing a mathematical equation, or constructing a project or experiment. These are called performance-based tests.

Tips for Using Technology in Assessment

1. Be knowledgeable. Familiarize yourself with the software you intend to use so that you are able to answer student questions effectively and efficiently.

2. Use performance-based assessments. Performance-based assessments allow students to demonstrate their knowledge by applying skills like collaboration, planning, complex reasoning and problem solving etc. When paired with technology such as online simulations these assessments also allow students to show their knowledge by reading and responding to various literary, visual, and digital displays.

3. Assess your assessment. Assess the effectiveness of the software being used to determine whether it aligns with course objectives and program outcomes.

Reference:

The Importance of Using Assessment

Assessments are used to improve course, program, and institutional outcomes. Using assessment in Higher Education allows for overall institutional improvement and accountability. We use assessment and evaluation to improve instruction and student learning.

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