

Criteria for Successful Assessment Programs for Distance Learning Library Instruction

Assessment Versus Evaluation:

“The term ‘assessment’ is often used synonymously with ‘evaluation’, although there are important differences. Assessment refers specifically to the measurement of ... learning gains, whereas evaluation implies a judgment that may be made based on assessment information. Data from assessments are not considered good, bad, or ugly but are evidence to support an evaluative statement of significance or quality.” (Zvacek, 1999, p. 39).

“The point of assessment is not to gather data and return results, it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide improvement”. (Knight, 2002, p. 15).

Criteria for Assessment Programs:

- **Establish Outcome-Based Goals**
What are you trying to accomplish with an instructional program for distance students?
What decisions will be made with the information from the assessment?
- **Collaboration is the Key**
It is important to work with academic departments and other stakeholders in the design and implementation of an assessment program.
- **Assessments Need to be Based on Desired Outcomes**
Assessments reflect students’ ability to grasp concepts and develop information skills.
- **Alternative Assessments Should be Used**
“Alternative assessment, as its name implies, is a method of gauging students’ progress in ways unlike those most familiar to educators who are the products of a ‘traditional’ educational system”. (Zvacek, 1999, p. 40). Assessments should be based on performance, thus requiring students to either learn a skill or gauge the knowledge the student already possess. It is important to make sure the assessment is not too long or too difficult.
- **Assessment Programs are not Static**
In order to improve students’ information knowledge assessments need to be ongoing.

Types of Assessments

Problem-Based Learning:

Students are presented with situations and problems in which they must determine how to respond. Examples include:

- online exercises (usually multiple choice)
A common form of standardized assessment. Very effective for assessing large groups.

- selected response/checklists
Used to record opinions, attitudes, processes, and understanding of content and progress. This type can measure knowledge and reasoning skills (Williams, 2000).
- selected response/rank order
Used to assess students' ability to organize process or content in some natural or preordained order. This type also measures knowledge and reasoning skills (Williams, 2000).
- Selected response/simple match
This method involves two or more lists of choices to a problem. This type measures knowledge of specific facts and the ability to distinguish between them (Williams, 2000).
- essay/self reflection
This form requires the use of memory, recall, and comprehension. The student can construct search strategies and demonstrates higher-level learning outcomes (Williams, 2000).
- complex assignments
Based on a situation the student determines the nature and extent of information needed. This assessment method encourages students to investigate methods or various information retrieval systems (Williams, 2000).

General Websites on Assessment

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation
<http://ericae.net/>

Information Literacy Best Practices – Discussion Forum
<http://www.earlham.edu/discus/>

Distance Education and Assessment

Interactive Video Technology: A Tool for Teaching and Learning in Distance Education
By Cheryl McCarthy
<http://home.earthlink.net/~esmejake/asld015.htm>

Pretests of Students' Library & Information Skills

Skill Survey for New Students
By Susan Foster-Harper. Developed for use at University of Charleston, West Virginia.
<http://www.uchaswv.edu/library/instruct/skill.html>

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