

Advantages and Disadvantages of Assessment Techniques

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Portfolios ...collections of student work...

Advantages:

- * are adaptable to different
 levels of assessment (i.e. individual student, program, institution)
 purposes (i.e. cross-sectional snapshot; change/progress over time)
 kinds of materials (i.e. written work, tapes of performances, student self-assessments)
- * can tell us where students are *and* how they got there
- * emphasize human judgment, meaning-making
- * provide information likely to be *used*
- * engage students, faculty
- * are educational for both students and faculty
- * reduce fears of misuse

Disadvantages:

- * can be labor-intensive
- * can be cumbersome to store
- * require carefully defined criteria for review
- * require training for reviewers

Solutions/responses:

- * collect *samples* of work, not everything from everybody
- * use electronic storage and retrieval
- * give students responsibility for maintaining the portfolio
- * invest in good criteria for education's sake
- * invest in training for faculty development's sake

Capstone courses, projects, activities ...

Advantages:

- * are cumulative
- * are integrative
- * are adaptable to demonstration of
 skills
 general education
 professional field or major
 combinations
- * are motivation for students
- * set standards
- * provide an occasion for department-level discussion, interpretation
- * invite external evaluation
- * help students make the transition to
 self-assessment
 professional assessment
 life-long learning

Disadvantages:

- * can be difficult to “capture” all students in their final semester
- * can mean an additional course requirement
- * can be difficult to coordinate multiple dimensions of learning & assessment
- * can be labor-intensive
- * require carefully defined criteria for review
- * require distinguishing between purpose of the capstone for the *students* and for *program assessment*

Solutions/responses:

- * require the capstone for graduation
- * include capstone experiences within existing courses
- * provide resources, staff support
- * view resources, labor, as worthwhile investment

Performances...

Advantages:

- * have face validity
- * put emphasis on what the student can *do*:
 - integrative
 - a reality check
- * give students with practical intelligence, skills, a chance to shine
- * are motivating
- * put the emphasis on active learning
- * promote “coaching” relationship between students and faculty, especially when there are external reviewers
- * promote self-assessment, internalization of standards
- * are highly adaptable, even to liberal arts

Disadvantages:

- * can be labor-intensive, time-consuming, expensive
- * require careful definition of criteria
- * require careful training of reviewers
- * require coordination, esp. of external reviewers
- * may frighten off insecure students

Solutions/responses:

- * review a *sample* of students
- * embed in routine, non-threatening situation (e.g., internship, clinical setting)
- * regard criteria and training as an educational investment
- * remind students they must demonstrate employability

Common assignments, secondary readings, and other embedded assignments...

Advantages:

- * use work produced by students as a normal part of their course work
- * solve the problem of quality of student effort
- * are efficient, low-cost
- * have face validity
- * provide maximally useful information with minimum slippage
- * encourage discussion, collaboration among faculty & support staff
- * can create campus-wide interest

Disadvantages:

- * require coordination
- * can be time-consuming to create the common assignment
- * can be time-consuming, labor-intensive to score
- * require careful definition of criteria for review
- * require careful training of reviewers

Solutions/responses:

- * provide support
- * remember the efficiencies, benefits
- * make the investment

Classroom Assessment/Research...

Advantages:

- * takes place at ground zero of learning process for:
 - maximum relevance, usefulness
 - minimum slippage
 - minimum risk
- * is conducted continuously, has formative benefit
- * provides feedback on *both*
 - what students know and can do
 - and how they got there, what helps or hinders
- * motivates students to become more active, reflective learners
- * can also be used by faculty collectively for the bigger picture
- * is faculty-friendly, respectful of privacy, autonomy
- * offers significant resources and support network, especially for community college educators

Disadvantages:

- * is unstructured, particularly dependent on individuals' cooperation for
 - administration of CATs
 - reporting of results
- * presents challenge of generalizing to program or institution level

Solutions/responses:

- * provide consistent, careful leadership, oversight
- * get buy-in from faculty, others
- * provide training
- * make assessment a campus-wide conversation
- * remember the potential: to generate truly useful information for improvement

Local tests...

Advantages:

- * require active faculty participation
- * stimulate discussion about goals, curriculum, pedagogy, etc.
- * have content validity
- * can change readily in response to institutional changes
- * can be open-ended, highly creative in format
- * can provide good quality of student effort if course-embedded
- * provide directly relevant, *useful* information
- * forestall comparison with other institutions

Disadvantages:

- * run risk of focusing more on surface than deep learning
- * provide no norms for reference
- * may contain ambiguous, poorly constructed items
- * reliability and validity may be questioned
- * contracting out test construction is expensive
- * will not elicit good quality of student effort if seen as add-on
- * will create misunderstanding of assessment if seen as a threat
- * tend to invite finger-pointing

Solutions/responses:

- * if norms are important, supplement with purchased test
- * use on-campus expertise
- * be careful, pilot any test before large-scale administration
- * provide a “gripe sheet”
- * accept that assessment is ultimately human judgment, not psychometric science
- * keep the focus on useful information & information, *not* test scores *per se*
- * depersonalize, avoid finger-pointing

Off-the-shelf objective tests...

Advantages:

- * traditional, widely recognized & accepted means of “assessment”
- * require little on-campus time or labor
- * prepare students for licensure, other high-stakes testing
- * are norm-referenced
- * offer longitudinal data
- * technical quality generally very good
- * may reflect recent, important trends in the field
- * can be useful as *part* of a multiple-method approach

Disadvantages:

- * often poor content validity
- * generally do not provide criterion-referenced scores
- * test students’ ability to recognize “right” answers
- * reflect students’ test-taking ability
- * often elicit poor quality of student effort, particularly as add-on
- * reinforce faculty bias toward “empty vessel” theory of education
- * reinforce student bias toward education as memorizing, regurgitating “right” answers (i.e. “surface” rather than “deep” learning)
- * carry risk of misuse of scores, invidious comparisons
- * provide little insight into students’ problem-solving & thinking skills or ability to discriminate among “good” and “better” answers
- * give students no opportunity to demonstrate important affective traits, e.g., persistence, meticulous, creativity, open-mindedness.
- * are less likely than local methods to stimulate productive discussion
- * tend to invite finger-pointing, anxiety, resistance
- * can be very expensive
- * generally do not provide good value (i.e., useful information for cost)

Solutions/responses:

- * negotiate with test maker
- * supplement with other methods
- * use with caution