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AACSB AND OUTCOME ASSESSMENT: CHALLENGES FOR THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

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ABSTRACT

The assurance of learning standards of AACSB has shifted the focus from what is taught to what is learned. This change has provided the impetus for educators to apply the principles of outcome assessment to their courses to determine if students are learning what they are supposed to be learning in their classes. This paper discusses the assessment process for courses and gives examples of assessing course objectives.

INTRODUCTION

In April, 2003, the standards for the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) changed to include the assurance of learning standards. These standards are designed to evaluate how well a school is accomplishing its aims, and in doing so requires schools to demonstrate that learning has occurred for each of its degree programs. "The previous standards indicted what the school intended to teach whereas the new assurance of learning approach is about what the students have actually learned (Blood, 2005)." This was an exciting change in focus for AACSB because, after all, should not schools have been doing this all along?

AACSB realized that implementing such a change would take time, so rather than expecting immediate compliance, it allowed

business schools to follow a transitional schedule. The period of transition is over and ACSB now requires business schools to have Assurance of Learning Programs in place for each of their degree programs that focus on direct measures of student achievement (AACSB Assurance, 2007). AACSB firmly states that Assessment of Learning is here to stay:

> Over the past decade, mounting demands on educators for accountability have increased interest in the assessment of student learning. Institutions at all educational levels now are often required to prove to legislatures that students are indeed learning what educators claim they are teaching. In response, accreditation agencies, including regional assessment organizations and many professional accreditation agencies (including AACSB), also are placing a higher priority on assessment. This trend is gaining momentum–demands for assessment are here, and are not expected to abate any time soon (AACSB Overview, 2007:1).

Institutions are being called upon to prove that students are actually learning the information that is being taught and, in doing so, to show that a return on investment is being realized. Assurance of learning standards can assure potential students, trustees, public officials, supporters, and accreditors, that a school is meeting its goals. Additionally, they assist the school and faculty members in improving programs and courses (AACSB Standards, 2007).

AACSB suggests a five step plan to help schools with the implementation of the assessment process. They are:

1. Define learning goals and objectives.

2. Align curriculum with goals.

3. Identify instruments and measures.

4. Collect, analyze and disseminate assessment data.

5. Use assessment data for continuous improvement.

(AACSB Assessment Process, 2007:1)

The first step is to define the learning goals. These goals should be in agreement with the school's mission and describe the desired educational accomplishments of the degree programs. Once those learning goals are in place, the school must determine which components of the curriculum will contain those learning goals. Goals may be specific to one course or spread throughout the curriculum, or both. Once this has been determined, "faculty must establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure that proper learning experiences occur. Course syllabi, examinations, and projects should be regularly reviewed to see that learning experiences are included to prepare students to accomplish the intended learning goals (AACSB Standards, 2007:63)."

After the learning goals and objectives for the school have been defined and the curriculum aligned with those goals, instruments and measures must be identified to determine if students are achieving those goals and objectives. AACSB discusses various approaches that can be used to accomplish this; but encourages schools to "choose, create, and innovate learning measures that fit with the goals of the degree programs' pedagogies in use, and the schools' circumstances (AACSB Standards, 2007:64)."

One approach advocated by AACSB to determine if students are achieving the goals and objectives set forth is course-embedded assessment. It may be used when a course exposes students to learning experiences designed to teach a particular knowledge or ability specified in the school's learning goals. It involves the use of existing artifacts such as projects, tests, portfolios, presentations, papers, and the like. "In using this approach, it is important that the faculty understands that the intent is not to second-guess the assignment of grades, but only to focus on the assessment of student learning outcomes (Classroom Assessment, 2007:1)."

COURSE LEVEL ASSESSMENT

The new emphasis on outcome assessment should provide the impetus for educators to make an even greater effort to improve their courses and enhance the learning of the students in the classroom. Educators should commit to improving their teaching as well as student learning. Much of what is done to assess student achievement at the program level can be applied at the course level. Involvement in the process at the course level is not only important for those who teach the courses being assessed, but also for the faculty who depend on the competencies developed in those courses. Assessment results at the course level provide information to students about their learning and can lead to changes in classroom activities, assignments, and grading methods (Ammons, 2005).

What does this mean for faculty and the courses they teach? A good place to begin is to think about the overall role of the course in the curriculum. Why are students required to take the course? What should students be able to do after they have completed the course? Are the assessment tools currently in place adequately measuring student learning outcomes?

Educators must examine carefully the goals and objectives defined by the school and determine if their course might help students achieve program learning outcomes. For example, suppose one of the goals for the program is: Students will be able to effectively use technology to accomplish required business tasks. If an educator teaches a course where students are using technology to accomplish tasks, clearly that course may be chosen for the course embedded assessment process.

The microcomputer applications course would a good example of a course where this program goal may be assessed. A typical goal for course is:

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to use word processing, spreadsheet, database, and presentation software to create documents and solve common business problems.

This course goal is aligned with the program goal and may likely be used in the course embedded assessment process. That being the case, those involved in the accreditation process would examine the assessment tools currently in place for this course to determine if they adequately measure the achievement of the this goal.

Educators should already have tools or instruments in place that are assessing the achievement of course goals and objectives. The course goals and objectives are supposed to be aligned with program goals and objectives so, theoretically, the design of new course assessment tools to collect information on the achievement of student learning outcomes should not be necessary. One might guess, however, that this is not always the case. Sometimes, new course assessment tools must be created because those in place do not adequately assess the goals and objectives of the course.

Educators should, then, examine all courses that they teach to be sure that the assessment instruments or tools within their courses

do measure whether students are achieving the stated goals and objectives of the course. Additionally, educators should not be complacent about a course just because that course is not directly involved in course embedded assessment at the present time. All courses are important; otherwise, those courses would not be required in the curriculum.

The steps designed to help schools with the assessment process for AACSB are applicable at the course level. All courses should have learning goals and objectives based on what the students should be able to do or what the students should know when they have completed the courses. In addition, instruments or tools should be in place to determine if the students are achieving these goals and objectives. Educators should strive for continuous improvement of their course. This paper will focus on goals and objectives at the course level and assessment tools to measure the achievement of these goals and objectives.

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Course goals describe the overall purpose of a course and what the students should be able to do at the completion of the course. Some courses have more than one goal while others do not; nonetheless, goals should be few in number. The goal(s) are determined by the general purpose of the course within the curriculum as a whole. Goals should be periodically reviewed and updated as necessary. They are very important because all other course components are derived from the course goal(s) (Developing 2007). Goals help in determining course content, teaching methodologies, assignments, and assessments.

Once the overall goals are established, objectives should be determined. Course objectives are derived from the course goals and

should state specific student learning outcomes that will be achieved upon successful completion of the course. "They break down into explicit, observable and measurable behaviors that demonstrate competency (Developing, 2007: 1)." Objectives should be written in behavior terms. That is, they should state what the student should be able to do at the completion of the course.

An invaluable aid in writing course objectives is Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Developed by Benjamin Bloom and a group of educators, Bloom's Taxonomy is a multi-tiered model of classifying thinking according to six cognitive levels of complexity. The six categories are arranged on a scale of difficulty level of cognitive thinking: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The table below is helpful in writing behavioral objectives. (Suggested verbs for each level are shown at the far right.)

Level	Definition	Behavior
Knowledge (Memorizing) ↓	recalling or remembering something without understanding, using, or changing it.	define, describe, identify, label, list, match, memorize, point to, recall, select, state
Comprehension (Understanding) ↓	Understanding something that has been communicated without necessarily relating it to anything else	alter, account for, annotate, calculate, change, convert, group, explain, generalize, give examples, infer, paraphrase, interpret, predict, review, translate
Application (Problem-Solving) ↓	using a general concept to solve problems in a particular situation; using learned material in new and concrete situations.	apply, adopt, collect, construct, demonstrate, discover, illustrate, interview, make use of, manipulate, relate, show, solve, use
Analysis (Dissecting) ↓	breaking something down into its parts; may focus on identification of parts or analysis of relationships between parts, or recognition of organizational principles.	analyze, compare, contrast, diagram, differentiate, dissect, distinguish, identify, illustrate, infer, outline, point out, select, separate, sort, subdivide
Synthesis (Creating) ↓	creating something new by putting parts of different ideas together to make a whole	blend, build, change, compile, compose, create, design, formulate, generate, hypothesize, plan, predict, produce, reorder, revise, tell, write

Evaluation (Judging)	judging the value of material or methods as they might be applied in a particular situation; judging with the use of definite criteria.	accept, appraise, assess, arbitrate, award, choose, conclude, criticize, defend, evaluate, grade, judge, prioritize, recommend, referee, reject, select, support

Source: Bloom (1956)

Heinich recommends writing objectives with the following four components. (He refers to these components as the ABCD's of objectives.)

Audience: Who will be learning the information?

Behavior: What will the student be able to do after the instruction? (This behavior should be measurable, observable, and specific.)

Condition: Under what circumstances will the learning occur?

Degree: What degree of accuracy (standard) must the student meet to reach acceptable performance?

Adapted from: Heinich (2002)

For example, a typical course objective for a microcomputer applications course might be:

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to create a well-designed spreadsheet including functions and formulas with absolute and relative cell references with 70 percent accuracy.

Notice that this objective satisfies the audience, behavior, condition, and degree requirements advocated by Heinich:

Audience	Student
Behavior	create well-designed spreadsheets including functions and formulas with absolute and relative cell references
Condition	at the completion of this course
Degree	70 percent accuracy

ASSESSMENT

Once the goals and objectives for a course have been developed, the educator must select the means of assessing the students. Assessing students goes for beyond the purpose of merely determining grades in a course. It enables the educator to determine whether the students have achieved or mastered the goals and objectives of the course. As stated earlier, a course may become involved in course embedded assessment process required for AACSB accreditation purposes.

The educator should begin by carefully examining every assessment tool currently in place such as exams, projects, problems, papers, cases, and the like. Do these tools give a clear picture of what

the student is able to accomplish as it relates to those goals and objectives?

The most popular method used in courses is that of objective testing. This instrument, however, may not be the assessment tool that will adequately determine if the course goals and objectives have been met. Assessment tools such as cases, problems, and projects may be better choices than objective tests. Or, perhaps the tests simply need revision to include additional items such as essay, discussion, cases, fill-in-the-blank, or problems.

In fairness to the student and the instructor, the instructions for assignments or projects should be clear to the students about instructor expectations. Additionally, the students should know the criteria that will be used to evaluate the assignment.

EXAMPLES

As stated earlier, course objectives must be aligned with course goals. One assessment instrument may or may not be able to assess a particular course goal because a goal is very broad in scope. For that reason, the following examples illustrate the assessment of a course objective rather than a course goal. Also, the means of assessing used is a rubric which is good for performance based or subjective class assignments. Each example includes the subject area, a course objective, the assessment tool, scoring suggestions, and comments.

EXAMPLE ONE

Subject Area: Information Systems

Objective. The student will be able to see relationships between MIS concepts and explain them visually using concept mapping.

Assessment Tool. Class Project

Description. Research an information system topic from a list provided by the instructor. Prepare a 10 minute presentation on the topic to be presented to the class. Also, prepare a concept map to show any relationships between concepts that may be discovered in your research.

Comments. *Consider assigning two grades for this project. One would be on the presentation and the other on the concept map. A scoring rubric could be used to evaluate the presentation as well as the concept map. Another option would be to require a written report in addition to the presentation and the concept map. Students should be aware of the criteria to be used in the evaluation of the project. A rubric that could be used for the presentation portion of this project is shown below. It was developed for this paper at teAnology rubric builder website (http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/).*

INFORMATION SYSTEMS PRESENTATION

	Criteria				Point
	1	2	3	4	
Organization	Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.	Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.	Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.	Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.	____

Content Knowledge	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.	Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.	Student is at ease with content, but fails to elaborate.	Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) with explanations and elaboration.	____
Visuals	Student used no visuals.	Student occasional used visuals that rarely support text and presentation.	Visuals related to text and presentation.	Student used visuals to reinforce screen text and presentation.	____
Mechanics	Student's presentation had four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation had three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	____
Delivery	Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in	Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing	Student's voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly.	Student used a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms.	____

	the back of class to hear.	presentation.			
				Total----->	____

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EXAMPLE TWO

SUBJECT AREA: MANAGEMENT

Objective. The student will be aware of the ethical dilemmas faced by managers and the importance of human resources to the success of the business.

Assessment Tool. Case Study

DESCRIPTION. YOU ARE MANAGER IN A COMPANY THAT IS DOWNSIZING. THERE ARE FOUR MIDDLE MANAGEMENT EMPLOYEES AND TWO OF THESE MANAGERS WILL HAVE TO BE TERMINATED.

1. Jane Scott has been employed at this company for 40 years—since she graduated from high school. She is now 58, but would like to work until she is 65. She has been in charge of the records department, which uses open files and a color-coded system.

2. Jerry Sanders is a new employee who has become valuable to the company because of his expertise in information systems.

3. Ellen Jamison is an expert in the marketing field who has been working at this company for ten years. She is frequently ill but manages to keep up with her work at home.

4. Jules Green is a very personable manager who manages to keep the employees working together. He has been with company two years.

You must tell two of these people that because of downsizing they will no longer be employed at the company.
Discussion Questions:
Which employees would you keep? Why?

Which employees would you terminate? Why?

How can you make the termination less traumatic for the employees?

Can you think of a way to keep all of the employees?

Adapted from: Ross (2002)

A case write-up is required and is due at the beginning of the period in which you must present this case. The write up will be a summary of your case and should be no longer than 5 double spaced pages. (You will be able to provide more details when you present the case in class) Provide answers to the discussion questions as well as include the decision to be made, the critical issues involved, and your recommended course of action with support for your decision.

Comments: *The students should know the format to be used for the case. For example, will it be a "write-up" case where students come to class with their thoughts in writing using a particular format or a group case given orally in class, or both. The students should have clear instructions on what is expected, and the criteria used for evaluating the case. As with the previous example, a rubric would be a good evaluation tool for this case. The following rubric was obtained from Rubistar (http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=ShowRubric&rubric_ id=1432542&).*

MANAGEMENT CASE

CATEGORY	**Excellent** **4 points**	**Good** **3 points**	**Average** **2 points**	**Poor** **1 point**	**Score**
Identification of Key Issue(s)	Student defines all of the key issues in the case.	Student defines all but one of the key issues in the case.	Student overlooks two of the key issues in the case.	Student overlooks more than two key issues in the case.	
Analysis of Key Issue(s)	Student used current, credible research to analyze all the key issues in the case and offers excellent insights.	Student used the text to analyze the key issues in the case.	Student did not analyze one key issue.	Student overlooks two or more of the key issues in the case.	
Recommendation(s)	Recommendation follows logically from the student's situation analysis and research.	The student recommends a reasonable course of action.	The student recommended course of action is unsupported by his/her situation analysis.	The student does not make any specific recommendation.	

Source(s)	The student uses credible sources, reflecting current knowledge in the field, to make a convincing case for each assertion.	All assertions are supported with credible evidence.	Some assertions left unsupported.	No research is evident; student's assertions are unsupporte d.	
Grammar	Student's work contains no errors in spelling, punctuation, or word usage.	Student's work contains one error in spelling, punctuation, or word usage.	Student's work contains two errors in spelling, punctuation, or word usage.	Student's work contains more than two errors in spelling, punctuatio n, or word usage.	

Date Created: **July 17, 2007** (Rubistar, 2007)

EXAMPLE THREE

Subject Area: Marketing

Objective. The student will be able to develop a marketing plan for a new product applying the requirements, issues, and tools involved in marketing new products or services.

Assessment Tool: Group Term Project

Description. You are to create a new product and develop a marketing plan. Although you are allowed some flexibility, be sure to include the following steps. (Follow the guidelines discussed in class and in your text.)

1. Purpose

2. Situation Analysis

3. Objectives

4. Market Strategies (Product, Place, Price, Promotion)

You are required to present your plan in the form of a well-written, well-organized report including the use of visual such as photos, illustrations, graphs and charts. Use a 12-point serif font. Include a table of contents and be sure your report is grammatically correct with all errors corrected. Submit your report in a binder.

Comments: *This project is designed as a group project, but it could be for individual students as well. In addition, it could be expanded to include a presentation before the class. The following is considered to be a rubric, but it is quiet different from the two previous rubrics included in this paper. This rubric could easily be expanded using either Rubistar (http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php) or teAnology (http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/).*

MARKETING PLAN

Criteria	Points Possible	Score
APPEARANCE OF REPORT Professional looking (12 point serif font) Organized (table of contents included) Well written (grammatically correct; professional, positive tone ;) Use of visuals (photos, illustrations, graphs, and charts)	**30**	
PURPOSE Main benefits Markets to be served	**20**	
SITUATION ANALYSIS Internal factors External factors	**20**	
OBJECTIVES		
PRODUCT Product source Product description (product line and packaging) Profile of potential consumer	**20**	
PLACE	**20**	

Product channel of distribution (where and what means)		
PRICE Product cost (range)	**20**	
PROMOTION Product advertising (radio, newspaper, events)	**20**	
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS	**150**	

EXAMPLE FOUR

Subject Area: Finance

Objective: The student will be able to make informed investment decisions.

Assessment Tool: Term Project

Description. Assume that you have $100,000 to invest in the stock market. You must choose how to invest this money and you must justify your choice using principles discussed in the text and in class. You must submit the name of the stock you have chosen to "purchase" in the next 2 weeks. Track the price of the stock for a 12 week period. You must create a well-written and well-organized report which includes the justification of your purchase, the price fluctuations over the 12 week period (with a chart), and the possible reasons for the change in stock price. Last, conclude by stating

whether or not you think you made a good investment decision and why. You must include a cover page and site any outside sources. Use a 12-point serif font. Comments. *This could be a group or individual project. Also, it could be expanded to include a presentation to the class. (Notice that students are required to submit the name of the stock chosen before the tracing period begins.)*

INVESTMENT PROJECT

Criteria	Points Possible	Score
APPEARANCE OF REPORT Professional looking (12 point serif font) Organized (table of contents included) Well written (grammatically correct; positive tone) Use of visuals (photos, illustrations, graphs, and charts)	**20**	
CHOICE OF STOCK AND JUSTIFICATION Description of stock Valid reasons or justification for choice	**35**	
TRACKING OF STOCK PRICE Statement of means of tracking used Narrative of the results Inclusion of a chart showing fluctuations	**30**	
CONCLUSION Statement about the choice (good or bad) Reasons for this opinion	**15**	
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS:	**100**	

The rubrics for examples three and four were shorter versions that in examples one and two. Notice the point values for each section in these rubrics is much greater than the first two more detailed versions. The more detailed rubrics use a very simplified point system. The educator must determine the best option depending upon the course, the objective(s) to being evaluated, and the assessment tool being used. Many sites are available for help in the creation of rubrics. Although rubrics were used in these examples, not all assessment instruments require the use of rubrics. In all cases; however, a point value system must be devised so that students are aware of the way in which they will be assessed.

CONCLUSION

The new assurance of learning standards has shifted the focus from teaching to learning. Hopefully, educators will be motivated to examine their courses to determine if learning is taking place in their classes. The only way to determine if students are learning is through the assessment process. Learning goals and objectives must be in place and "operating", however, before they can be assessed. The faculty must join together to decide what the students must do to demonstrate learning achievement (Martel, 2007). Additionally, the means of assessment must be determined and administered.

A key part of the assessment process is the final step which may be, in some schools, an afterthought. Faculty must look at the results of assessment and use those results to improve student learning (Pringle, 2007). If this step is left out or overlooked, continuous improvement will not occur. Faculty cooperation and involvement are essential in this process. "Working together to help ensure that students meet this vision often creates a sense of community and purpose that reminds faculty members why they entered academe in the first place (Martell, 2007:7)".

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