Journals Seeking Faculty Articles on Assessment, Evaluation and Learner-Centered Education

Several peer-reviewed journals focus on assessment, evaluation (grading) and learner-centered teaching. Each issue of Assessment Matters will present two or more respected venues for sharing creative pedagogy. If you would like to promote a specific journal on these pages, please send us the title(s), and, if you wish, relate your experiences with the journal.

Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education is an established international peer-reviewed journal that publishes papers on all aspects of assessment and evaluation in higher education. Its mission is to advance the understanding of assessment and evaluation practices and processes, particularly the contribution that these make to student learning and to course, staff, program and institutional development. AHEE welcomes research-based, reflective or theoretical studies that help to illuminate the practice of assessment. It sets out to provide readily accessible, up-to-date information about significant developments within the field, with a view to sharing an extension of innovative practice and the development of ideas. Suggestions for special issues are welcomed. Eight issues per year. http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/caeh20/current

Assessment Update is a newsletter dedicated to covering the latest developments in higher education assessment. AU offers information and practical advice on conducting assessments in a range of areas, including student learning and outcomes, faculty instruction, academic programs and curricula, student services and overall institutional functioning. Articles cover an array of assessment-related issues, including methods, tools, processes, measures and design and implementation models. Bimonthly. http://www.assessmentupdate.com/about.aspx

End of Semester Symposium

On May 17, 2013, the Biology and Medical Laboratory Technology Department at BCC conducted an all-day symposium, entitled Reflections on Research, Teaching, and Learning at the CTLT. The symposium featured papers/presentations by department scholars, centering on topics as diverse as transporter proteins in a cell model of the Alexander disease, using flash card software in specific classes, attending to student needs in a hybrid course, teaching a hybrid course and using embedded questions to reveal course content, teaching a hybrid course and using embedded questions to reveal course content, and teaching a hybrid course and using embedded questions to reveal course content. Three presentations demonstrated using in-class writing to teach science; one presentation demonstrated how to encourage summarizing skills in wiki assignments, another presentation showed how to write creatively about science, and another focused on addressing course outcomes via writing. In all, more than a dozen professors presented innovative ways to engage, teach and assess students.

What Makes A Person “Educated”?*

The question harkens back to the days when Socrates challenged the local citizenry in Athens to defend their beliefs, suppositions and long-held impressions. The fellows at the Critical Thinking Foundation in Berkeley, CA, ask similar questions and teach professors how to ask them of their students.

Booklet materials from the 33rd International Conference of the Foundation for Critical Thinking and Educational Reform seek to define, or perhaps, redefine, an educated person. The following statements (adapted and slightly edited) detail the intellectual traits of educated persons:

- Change their position when faced with reasoning superior to their own
- Give serious consideration to alternate conclusions
- Think with breadth and depth when the question requires them to do so
- Formulate their purposes clearly and accurately, check multiple purposes for consistency and determine how their purposes relate with the issue at hand
- Persevere through difficulties in issues
- Apply the same standards to their own thinking and behavior that they expect of others
- Have the courage to examine their beliefs and stand alone, using disciplined reasoning when opposed by others

We notice that these characteristics are more than simply ways of thinking or products of education; they are
Grading Vs. Outcomes Assessment: Form & Content—Their Differences Are Important

Though they may overlap at times and often appear similar in form, grading of student work and the assessment of student learning outcomes based on student work are fundamentally two separate activities, and analysis of their data provides different information about student learning.

Grading

Educators who are still suspicious of this “latest educational fad” called assessment, and educators who have not yet incorporated outcomes assessment into their teaching with “I give tests and go over them in class. Isn’t that assessment?” Or, “I give midterms and comprehensive final exams to assess what my students have learned in my class.” Or, “I spent hours grading student essays, giving feedback, helping students revise. Jeez! Isn’t that enough?”

The time-honored teaching/grading paradigm—impacting information to students and evaluating them at certain points of the semester, totalling and averaging their grades and arriving at a final grade—does reveal a certain measure of student achievement. We as educators have come to regard the final grade as a credible and accurate judgment of the student’s work and abilities. The transcript grade provides a sense of closure and serves as a way to communicate with transfer colleges, employers, parents and the students themselves about how the student performed, but it does not indicate what in the curriculum the student learned or failed to learn and where his or her difficulties lay in the learning. Nor does it indicate in which specific areas of the curriculum—which type of algebraic equation, what element of thesis support, where in a computer programming unit the student excelled, stalled or failed to perform. We come to understand the grade as a definitive statement of the student’s mastery or failure of the class material, but that is not the whole story of the learning that took place, or did not take place, in the class.

Additionally, final grades often include points lost or gained for behaviors and attitudes to learning, which are important to student success in the class, and, as many instructors claim, might help ready the student for the working world. While many educators would agree that behaviors should influence the overall grade, points given or subtracted more often reflect class order, student responsibility, and making life, and grading, easier for the instructor. For example, the grade roster from an Astronomy II class informs us that of the 28 students who completed the course, 4 students earned a, B, B, 10 C, 4 D, and 2 F as final grades. We consider these letter grades to be accurate reflections of each student’s intellectual engagement of the course material. Looking closer, however, we see the final grades also include nonacademic performance: attendance, class participation, a penalty for repeated tardiness, penalties for late work, etc. None of these tell us what, in fact, the student learned.

Assessment

For these 28 students in Astronomy II, assessment would indicate in which specific areas of the curriculum the student learned or failed to learn. Assessment looks closely at a course’s content and measures how well students performed on the formula and the grade follows the student’s work in a course or program, and the grade tells us a great deal about how and what students are learning.

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Grading might appear similar, as when a group of questions on a final exam or an essay or a dance performance have embodied outcomes within them, the content of the two provide different information about student performance.

This chart briefly highlights some of the major differences in outcomes assessment and grading.

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<th>CRITERION</th>
<th>OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>GRADING</th>
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<td>Content</td>
<td>Ongoing: To improve learning</td>
<td>Final: To gauge quality</td>
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<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Process-oriented: How students are learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Diagnostic: Identify areas for improvement</td>
<td>Judgmental: Arrive at an overall score/letter grade</td>
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Course Learning Outcomes

While helpful in evaluating overall student performance in a class, grades by themselves are limited, unable to point the instructor to what specific areas students are achieving or not achieving the course learning outcomes (CLOs). At Bronc Community College, we assess student performance according to the seven general education proficiencies approved by the faculty senate in 2004: communication, scientific method, information literacy, reasoning and analysis, mathematical methods, global awareness, personal growth and professional development. To assess these proficiencies in content areas, course and program learning outcomes are aligned to one of the seven GenEd proficiencies. For example, a CLO of Astronomy II might be: Student will calculate the distance to selected stars using the magnitude-distance formula (mathematical methods). To see how well students have mastered this form of calculation, the instructor would have one or several questions on the final exam (or use some other vehicle) that test the student’s ability to successfully employ the magnitude-distance formula, since its importance is clearly articulated by the CLO. After gathering data and reviewing how well students performed on the formula and whether or not the benchmark he or she initially set is being met, the instructor