Chapter VIII

Creating a Unified System of Assessment

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Abstract

The approach to curriculum design and development are essential elements to consider when creating a unified system of learning assessment. Although there are differences between facilitating curriculum online and in the classroom, the modalities do not need to be treated as separate paradigms when establishing assessments. By creating an approach not governed by delivery, education can be made more effective in all modalities. When academic programs are designed in a sound and systematic approach, learning assessment is a natural function of curriculum deployment. Assessing learning without assessing its associated curriculum design is essentially the act of looking at an effect without mentioning its causes. This chapter suggests that the goal of any institution in developing curriculum should be to create an assessment methodology that is integrated throughout its curriculum in a conscious manner, not specific to a modality.
Introduction

The effectiveness of online education is still under debate. However, acceptance of this learning modality is beginning to evolve, as the breadth of programs expands and online education becomes ubiquitous. More significant, online learning’s market segment, which was once overwhelmingly composed of adult learners, is beginning to include younger students as well. With this influx of students and, consequently, learning styles, educators and administrators have questioned whether an online class can provide an outcome-based education wherein students never see their teacher.

This line of inquiry assumes that the physical distance between student and faculty dictates the learning process and that modality is a crucial factor in designing curriculum and assessments. While there are clear differences between online and classroom settings, the modalities do not need to be treated as separate paradigms. Potentially, by creating an approach not governed by delivery, education can be made more effective in all modalities, and the perception of distance can be diminished.

Dilemma of Modality-Based Assessment

Over the past 15 years, the appropriateness of online modalities, specifically the delivery of information and the assessment of intended outcomes, has been debated. Conversely, many online, nontraditional universities have experienced success in terms of student growth and retention, and traditional universities are now considering, or already adding, online education to their offerings. The potential of the medium and its ability to reach a broad base of students has seemingly outweighed several of its detractors. This shift has not stymied the discussion of discrepancy between modalities; rather, the addition of new voices brings even more questions regarding its viability in comparison to traditional education and its differences in approach, especially in the conceptualization of assessment. The true issue of this debate is, perhaps, the perception that online and face-to-face delivery and assessment are mutually exclusive. Part of the debate appears to suggest that, because online is a different modality of content delivery, there should also be a different approach to assessing learning.

Division has seemingly grown between the two modalities of learning, as evidenced in the sheer amount of journals, conferences, and other media dedicated specifically to online education. The discussion is hardly limited to market position, as a great deal of attention to modality differences and