Chapter 1
Alignment of Course Objectives and Assessment Items: A Case Study

Kenneth Lightfoot
Thomas Edison State College, USA

David Schwager
Thomas Edison State College, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines how achieving close alignment between course objectives and course assessments should be an essential goal in the course design/revision process regardless of what mode of delivery is involved. By examining the revision of two courses (Western Civilization I & II) offered at Thomas Edison State College, the authors demonstrate how the application of sound instructional design principles to achieve this alignment resulted in the measurable improvement of student learning outcomes. The major issue examined in this study is how to achieve a close correlation between what a course states that a student should be able to do after successful completion, what practice it offers them to achieve this proficiency, and how they are assessed to determine what level of proficiency they have attained.
BACKGROUND

The advent of the computer has led to a sustained revolution in education in the United States, giving educational institutions the ability to reach a student body literally around the world. This online revolution has enabled large numbers of people who for various reasons could not otherwise pursue their education in a traditional setting to participate in an ever increasing range of educational programs. This steady increase in the number of people now able to receive an education regardless of their location has in turn led to a large-scale effort on the part of educational institutions in the United States to expand their curricula to meet the needs and demands of an increasingly diverse student population. The result has been a tremendous proliferation of online courses at every level of education.

While the computer has opened up a whole new horizon in education for students, the pressure to produce courses and programs placed on those responsible for actual production has often led to quality control issues that are unfortunately common throughout the community of education providers. Two of the principle factors affecting quality control in many course production units are limited numbers of staff that can be assigned to a project coupled with tight production schedules driven by demand for both course development and revision. All too often, in addition to content experts, course development teams involve only two or three members of staff who are responsible for all aspects of development and maintenance. Since course authors or content experts are seldom versed in sound instructional design principles and practices it falls upon members of a development team to make sure that these principles and practices are incorporated into the course design and revision process.

Of the myriad issues involved in the production and maintenance of a good-quality course, this case study seeks to examine one in particular that is within the control of course developers: the alignment of the course objectives and assessment items.

Good quality courses don’t just happen; they are the result of planning and an involved process of selecting appropriate material for a target audience balanced with devising assignments and assessment items that will give that audience ample scope to master the chosen material and demonstrate that mastery.

One of the key elements in this relationship is the alignment between what a course states that students should be able to do after successfully completing it, the learning exercises it features to prepare them to achieve this level of competency, and the assessment items it uses to test this competency. In most courses this can be expressed as the relationship between course (and if applicable, modular) objectives and assessment items, such as projects, written assignments, term papers, examinations, etc. When there is a clear correlation between what is expected of a student, the exercises they are asked to do in order build towards meeting those expecta-
New Approaches of Nanocomposite Materials for Electromagnetic Sensors and Robotics
www.igi-global.com/article/new-approaches-nanocomposite-materials-electromagnetic/53361?camid=4v1a