

Course Assessment– Part B: Your Results & Analysis

#261

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Part B: Your Results

Directions

1. Report the outcome achievement data gathered via the assignments, tests, etc. you identified for each outcome (question 3) of your Part A. *

I believe in measures: papers, tests, quizzes. I tell my students that if I had my way, there would be no grades. But academic programs and colleges need grades to assess student performance, and therefore I include many measures of academic performance in WR 121. For the Fall Term of 2-17, I had 28 graded assignments, most of them minor, some of them major, and I have found that having this many makes the process of evaluating final grades (explained in the course syllabus) much easier. I also have found it evens out the distribution of grades. Although I am perfectly willing to give all A's if the everyone in the class earned an A, for this course in Fall Term 2017, I gave 4 A's as final grades, 3 B's, 3 C's, 2 D's, and 2 F's, which I have discovered is close to the likely distribution of a class like this.

Outcome #1

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Although I do stress to my students the importance of writing for a variety of purposes (modes) and contexts, I instruct that there are to write for one audience--the most "difficult" audience: a general audience, which is what they will face in their careers. I think it is limiting and unreasonable to expect all students to write only for one narrow (e.g. academic) audience. This is a community college, and some of our students are impaired with disabilities. I try to reach all students and teach them to be clear, concise writers. Commented one students said this term on the evaluation for this course: "I have a lifelong learning disability I am overcoming. I do feel that I have learned a great deal in this class and will continue on with the next level of writing classes."

% of students who successfully achieved the outcome (C or above) *

Seventy-one percent of the 14 students who completed the course received a final grade of C or above. This is close to the average percentage for that measure in my previous WR 121 classes.

Outcome #2 *

Writing clear and coherent essays with a logical development of ideas is a cornerstone of WR 121 as I teach it. Mechanical proficiency is important, and I cover it thoroughly, with tests (rather than just tell students to "look it up"), for faulty grammar and punctuation can undermine an otherwise good essay. As in previous terms I have taught this course, I noticed a steady improvement in most students' grades on the paper they wrote in the course. One quality I stress to achieve clarity in an essay is the development of ideas--of "showing" with examples, anecdotes, statistics, direct quotes and other evidence, rather than just "telling." And of course I require research--correctly documented--in the final paper. Students recognized these efforts. Said one student in the course evaluation: "I was uninformed about . . . writing, and now I can write for those expecting professional language." Said another: "I had minimal experience writing essays at the beginning of this course, [and] WR 121 has helped me develop this skill."

% of students who successfully achieved the outcome (C or above) *

Eighty-three percent of students received a C or better on the final paper, which is a research paper and the culmination of all we have covered in this course.

Outcome #3 *

More than any other outcome, this one addresses my course's efforts to promote critical thinking. Of the 28 graded measures in this course, about half address critical thinking--determining a writer's purpose and perspective--in one way or another. For three-fourths of the papers written in this course, I require students to write developed critiques of two of their fellow students' papers, and they are graded for this effort. Critiquing is an intellectual exercise, requiring the critiquer to critically read an essay, judge how well it follow the assignment, assess its clarity, and then write a developed evaluation of those qualities. In almost all cases, the grades for critiquing had improved by the end of the course. Some students complain that this is hard work ("fatiguing," as a previous student said), but most eventually recognize it as an intellectually rigorous reading, thinking, and writing exercised. Said one student on this term's evaluation: "I learned quite a bit [from] reading and critiquing [other students'] papers." In addition to this form of critiquing, I require it of essays--some well written, some no--that I hand out in class. We discuss these essays thoroughly, but some students are shy about participating in class discussions, so for some of those essays I had out a critiquing form they are to fill out about the essay. It, too, is a reading/thinking/writing exercise, and it allows me to assess how everyone in the class is doing the work.

% of students who successfully achieved the outcome (C or above) * By the end of the course, 90 percent of the students were receiving the highest possible grade for critiquing two of their fellow students' papers.

ANALYSIS**3. What contributed to student success and/or lack of success? ***

Because many of the students who come to our college are not prepared to do college work, I do a lot of "in loco parentis" (in the place of the parent) encouragement. I warn them about procrastination (a huge problem among students). I point out the importance of their taking more responsibility for their learning, and taking initiative. I warn them not to assume that what got them by in high school will get them by in college (MANY students tell me they had to do little or not writing in high school). I tell them attitude is everything and whether they "like" a course subject or the instructor is irrelevant. I note that this is a face-to-face class, and while I am not offended if they don't come to class, they will miss stuff. In the evaluation at the end of this term's course, I asked this question: "Assume that a friend is considering taking this course from this instructor, and the friend asks you, 'What most determines doing well in this course, from this instructor?' How would you reply?" Among the typical responses in this term's evaluation: "Take responsibility and initiative." "I would tell my friend, 'Attend class, do the work, study well, and don't procrastinate.'" "To do well in this class, I would suggest that you do the following: 1. Follow the assignment calendar--to the letter. 2. Do all of the homework. 3. Plan your time--start your assignments early. 4. Actively participate in class. Learn from your mistakes. 5. Study, Study, Study. . . ."

4. Helping students to realistically self-assess and reflect on their understanding and progress encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning. Consider comparing your students' perception of their end-of-term understanding/mastery of the three outcomes (found in student evaluations) to your assessment (above) of student achievement of the three outcomes. *

As I mentioned above, I am constantly encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning. One vehicle I have been using for several years that help promote this quality is a day-by-day assignment calendar (currently 15 pages long). This calendar tells what we will be doing every class sessions. So if a student is absent, he or she can see what we did, plus when every assignment is due. In this term's evaluation, one of the questions I asked of students was whether this helped. Among the responses: "The assignment calendar was exceptional. It helped me budget my time." "The daily agenda made it very easy to keep up, and I wish all the classes did this." "I loved being able to look at the [assignment calendar] and see what we were doing for our next class. It made getting assignments done easier and more organized."

5. Did student achievement of outcomes meet your expectations for successfully Yes, it did. I feel a good teacher should establish assignments and expectations that are so clear that basically the student has either of two

teaching to each outcome (question 4 from Part A) *

options: (1) do the work, or (2) choose not to do the work. There should be no room for confusion.

6. Based on your analysis in the questions above, what course adjustments are warranted (curricular, pedagogical, student instruction, etc.)? *

I am continually revising all of my courses, noting which assignments, exercises, even tests are not work--e.g. most of the students are not doing well on that particular measure. I feel it is incumbent on the instructor to establish clear goals, expectations and assignments, and the student is left with the decision of either trying to accomplish them, or not.

7. What resources would be required to implement your recommended course adjustments (materials, training, equipment, etc.)? What Budget implications result?

As we in the writing faculty have often discussed, too many students come in to WR 121 with serious writing impairment. We need more writing levels to prepare for WR 121.

8. Reflect on any adjustments you made from the last assessment of this course (if applicable) and their effectiveness in student achievement of outcomes. *

I find that, for most students, repetition and reinforcement is key to learning; one lecture, one reading assignment doesn't necessarily mean it will be absorbed. I used to do more lecturing, more projecting of sentences and paragraphs on the screen in our "smart classroom, but I found that most students need a hard-copy handout they can mark on and take home. Keep track of these handouts is not a challenge for most students, just to those who are disorganized. So I asked on this term's evaluation: "I gave you a lot of handouts--so you could mark on them and take them home. The alternative to that, if you don't want so many handouts, is that I do more lecturing and more projecting of material on the screen

--and you take notes (or not) on that. Which would you prefer: handouts, or more lecturing?" Typical among the responses: "I prefer the handouts. I find them very helpful. I am keeping them for future use. I will refer back to them when needed. I did not find it that difficult to keep track of the handouts. I heard a lot of complaining from others about the handouts [but] I think that if they had put more effort into figuring out a tracking method for them vs. complaining about the handouts, the complainers would have done better and felt better about the handouts." "I feel the handouts did help a lot more than I originally thought they would. It was a nice change of pace compared to my other classes. Even though carrying all of those handouts around was kind of annoying in the end it was nice to have all of the materials at hand when I needed to consult them." "I prefer handouts because they provide a hands-on experience, which enables the material to be committed to long-term memory. I will remember Professor Kaser's "grammar hammer" years from now. Reading sample essays from previous years' students helped me to develop critiquing skills."

9. Describe how you have shared information about course outcomes with your students.

I believe in being as specific as possible in preparing students for what the course is about. That is why my syllabus for this course is 12 pages long. (And, the first week of the course, I give the students a quiz on the syllabus.) In the course assessment, students were asked whether the syllabus--and the course instruction in general--helped them achievement the course's outcomes. Some typical responses: "I have learned a great deal more than I knew. For example -- I now know how the apostrophe affects possession of something. I know more appropriate punctuation uses than I did when I started. I am much better at reducing unneeded words and phrases." "I feel like I learned quite a bit more than what I began the course with because I was taught how to recognize mistakes in my and others' writing and how to correct the errors." "I learned much more than I expected. I did not expect to learn how to critique an essay. I did not expect to learn a formulaic approach to essay development. This approach has been useful for the 10 essays I had to write during my first term at CGCC. I don't think that I would have learned as much about writing mechanics and essay development had I taken this class online."

10. Please describe any changes/additions to instruction, curriculum or assessment that you made to support students in better achieving the CGCC Core Learning Outcomes:

I feel this is covered in the comments above.

CLO #1: Communication. The areas that faculty are focusing on are: "Source and Evidence" and "Organization and Presentation"
and

CLO #2: Critical Thinking/Problem Solving. The areas that faculty are focusing on are: "Student's Position" (Critical Thinking) and "Evaluate Potential Solutions" (Problem Solving).

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