Overview of Course Embedded Assessment Tasks and Rubrics

Characteristics of Assessment Tasks

Course embedded. *Course embedded* simply means the task is included in the course and may be an existing assignment, test items, class exercise, project, class observation, lab report, etc. You can develop a new task.

Direct measure of student learning.

- Use a *direct measure* in which students demonstrate their learning with respect to the outcome, such as a writing assignment, class presentation, exercise, exam questions, lab report, project, etc.
- Do not use *indirect measures* such as student evaluation of instruction or questionnaires that ask students their opinions or perceptions of their learning. See attached examples of tasks that are direct measures of student learning.

Measure the student learning outcome you have identified.

- At the risk of stating the obvious—the task should measure the outcome you have identified. This is not always easy with abstract outcomes (e.g., analysis, integration, synthesis).

Measure the outcome in a *representative* and *substantive* way. The assessment task will produce a snapshot of student performance. It will not reveal everything the student knows or can do with respect to the outcome. But to the extent possible, the task should be a representative and substantive measure of the outcome. Two commonsense ways to look at this:

- Does the task yield results you *care* about?
- Does the task yield results you can use to improve the course?

Tasks can address more than one outcome, but you report on one. Tasks such as papers and projects are likely to address more than one outcome. For example, a writing assignment in a course might expect students to

1. Express ideas, facts, opinions and beliefs in ways that are relevant and appropriate to the audience, context, purpose and genre
2. State an idea/argument and develop it in a logical, organized form using conventional grammar, punctuation and formatting
3. Formulate and support ideas with sufficient reasoning, evidence and persuasive appeals, and proper attribution
4. Accurately summarize and interpret the purposes and main ideas of texts and performances

If your task addresses multiple outcomes, you should decide which one to report on for general education assessment.

No need for pre and post comparisons. Your department may decide to use a pre and post test, but you do not need to do a pre and post comparison for general education assessment purposes. The GEAC asks for assessment of the outcome at the end of the course, unit, or class where it is taught or addressed.

Rubrics and Procedures to Evaluate Student Performance

The GEAC framework uses five levels of student performance: 1) unsatisfactory, 2) underdeveloped/less than satisfactory, 3) competent/satisfactory, 4) proficient/more than satisfactory, and 5) exemplary. You must use these levels when you evaluate and report student performance. Each department will define what constitutes different levels of performance for their task. When completed, your department will have a common rubric with shared criteria and standards that instructors will use to evaluate students on the assessment task.

How to define levels of performance. Many of you have done this before but if not . . .

- Establish anchor points for exemplary and unsatisfactory performance. List the qualities/characteristics that typify exemplary and unsatisfactory performance.
- Once you define the lowest and highest levels of performance use these as anchor points to define the qualities of the remaining three levels.
- It's useful to look at examples of actual student work to help distinguish qualitative differences. Sort work into 5 performance levels. Describe the shared qualities of work within each level. Describe the shared qualities for each level and identify what distinguishes the work at one level from the next level.

Using the rubric to evaluate student performance. It is important to determine whether instructors can use the rubric consistently to evaluate student performance. Large variations in evaluation diminish the usefulness of your results. Some ways to increase the scoring consistency among evaluators.

Discuss the criteria used to evaluate student work. Instructors sometimes arrive at different judgments because they interpret the criteria different than one another. Instructors should discuss and compare their interpretations of the criteria used to evaluate student learning. The goal is to develop a shared understanding of the criteria.

Simplify. By using too many or overly complex criteria you run the risk of making it more difficult for instructors to agree on the quality of student work. Certainly you want the criteria to reflect the substance of the learning outcome. But if instructors have to split hairs or make complex inferences when they evaluate student work, it is likely their judgments will differ. A good rule of thumb is to develop criteria related to the essence of the outcome and not use criteria that are tangential or of minimal importance.

Practice(s) to discuss and compare how you evaluate student performance on the assessment task. It can be very helpful to hold your own practice session in which instructors individually evaluate some examples of student performance and then compare and discuss how you applied the criteria and decided on overall scores for student performance. This can help identify problems in the rubric or major differences among instructors before you evaluate all the student work. A goal of a practice session is to work towards greater agreement about the criteria and standards.

Assessment Task Worksheet (1 of 3)

If your group is just getting started you may want to use this worksheet. It includes questions and topics to consider as you create the task and rubric.

State the student learning outcome:

What are some tasks instructors already use to measure the outcome?

Whether you revise a current task or develop a new one be sure that you consider whether it

- measures something significant, central, important, substantive about the outcome
- will yield useful information you can use to improve the course, teaching, learning.

Discuss the criteria and standards you will use to evaluate student performance. Create a draft of the rubric—use the attached rubric template.

How do you plan to insure scoring consistency among instructors?

Discuss the logistics of the assessment.

- At what point in the course will the task be given?
- How will you collect and aggregate the results?

Assessment Task Worksheet (2 of 3)
Rubric Template

Strategy 1: Start listing the qualities and characteristics of student performance typical of each level. Often it is easier to define the anchor points first (i.e., exemplary and unsatisfactory) and then the adjoining levels.

Strategy 2: Collect examples of student work and sort it into 5 performance levels. Describe the shared qualities of work within each level. Describe the shared qualities for each level and identify what distinguishes the work at one level from the next level. During the process you may need to re-sort until you are satisfied that the work is categorized appropriately.

Strategy 3: Combine 1 and 2. List some qualities and test them out against examples of student work. Add characteristics based on what you find in actual work. Keep at it until you are satisfied that each level is clearly defined and is distinguishable from adjoining levels.

Performance Level	Criteria and Standards
Exemplary	
Proficient	
Competent	
Underdeveloped	
Unsatisfactory	

Assessment Task Worksheet (3 of 3)
Things to Keep in Mind as You Develop an Assessment Task

Develop an assessment task based on an existing assignment, project, exam questions, exercise, etc. Many instructors already use assignments that address general education learning outcomes. One option is to select and refine a task that is already used by one or more instructors. The department would adopt it for all sections of the course.

- Take stock of current assignments, projects, tests, etc that already address/measure the outcome. Which of these are the most preferable for use across all sections of the course?
- If you decide to use an existing task, identify any revisions in the format and content.
- Important questions to ask about the task
    - Does it measure the outcome—the intellectual activity embodied in the outcome?
    - Does it engage students in working with important subject matter in a substantive way? In other words, are you asking students to do a task that reveals something central and valuable about their learning?
    - Is it likely the task will produce information you can use to improve the course?
- Think about the future. You may be able to use the same task again next year to evaluate the same or a different outcome. What kind of information or *database* would be most useful to you over time?

Develop an assessment task from scratch. If the department decides not to use an existing assignment you will need to develop a new task for general education assessment.

- The task can be a new assignment, exercise, class presentation that can be used both for general education assessment and as a course assignment.
- Start with the outcome you plan to measure. Elaborate on what the outcome means in the context of the course. For example, what does it mean in the course to "synthesize" information from different disciplines. . . What would synthesis look like in the course? Where does it take place in the course? Where and how is synthesis taught in the course?
- Compare ways you have assessed this outcome in your classes.
- Propose some possible tasks based on current or past course materials. Vet different drafts and work toward consensus on which task is best for the assessment.
- Important questions to ask about the task
    - Does it measure the outcome—the intellectual activity embodied in the outcome?
    - Does it engage students in working with important subject matter in a substantive way? In other words, are you asking students to do a task that reveals something central and valuable about their learning?
    - Is it likely the task will produce information you can use to improve the course?
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