

A thick black L-shaped frame is positioned around the text. It starts at the top left, goes right, then down, then right again, forming a partial rectangular border around the central text.

COURSE EMBEDDED ASSESSMENTS

A Workshop in Assessment of Student Learning

Some Major Challenges in Assessment

- Issues of Control: Instructors of college courses are often distrustful of assessment systems that are implemented by outside organizations or individuals, fearing a loss of pedagogical independence and control
- Authenticity: assessments are often considered “inauthentic” – they are seen as artificial and disconnected from the learning process
- Resource constraints: Effective assessment often requires significant resources in terms of time, energy, and money
- Student motivation: assessments that are not undertaken to satisfy a grade, such as standardized tests of student learning, often provide little incentive for students to work their hardest. Embedding assessment within a grade course can ameliorate this problem

Course-Embedded Assessments Can Ameliorate These Problems

- Course-embedded assessments empower instructors to make their own decisions about success or failure in their classrooms, guided by consistent rubrics and scoring criteria
- Course-embedded assessments can be more efficient because they integrate assessment activities into regular classroom practices that instructors would undertake anyway

What are common elements of course-embedded assessments?

- Learning outcomes that reflect departmental, program, or school goals for student learning
- Consistent rubrics, developed by faculty and other stakeholders, that are flexible enough to protect instructor freedom
- Identifying specific tests, test items, assignments, or writings that are seen as particularly important for determining student success
- Shared and communicated best practices for determining student success or failure on a particular assessed skill

What are some common examples of specific course-embedded assessments?

- Deciding on a given essay question in a major class exam that can be used as a benchmark for broader student learning
- Developing a rubric for rating the quality of student responses on that question
- Instructors rating their own students on that question
- Comparing student performance on that question across different sections of the same course to better understand program success
- Assigning the same essay prompts to multiple sections of the same course
- Developing a rubric for rating the quality of student essays in response to that prompt
- Instructors rating their own student essays
- Using a pre/post model by assigning essay prompts at beginning and end of semester

What are challenges or disadvantages of course-embedded assessments?

- Faculty must “buy in” enthusiastically or there is no chance of success
- Course-embedded assessments take valuable instructor time and energy resources
- Tools for conducting such assessments, including development of prompts or questions and rubrics, must be built in advance and carefully planned to be most useful
- Different instructors must be aligned to have some degree of agreement about what constitutes student success, while allowing for differing standards and the nuances of context
- Data analysis and closing the loop have to be conducted in a timely manner, often after a semester has already wrapped up

Course-embedding is a useful tool and also a major undertaking

- Many faculty and stakeholders are unfamiliar with the concept of course embedding
- Because faculty members determine success or failure of their own students, outcomes are subject to various forms of unconscious bias and the limitations of individual perspective
- Course-embedded assessments are typically not useful for making cross-program or cross-institution comparisons because they are so closely tied to the specifics of a given course