Quick Guide: Approaches to Evaluating Student Coursework for Undergraduate Program Assessment

This quick guide was prepared by the WSU Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness (ACE) and is intended to help WSU programs and faculty consider approaches to evaluating student coursework as part of program assessment. ACE is also available to collaborate with WSU undergraduate degree programs on utilizing student coursework to measure student learning for program-level assessment. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information.

Introduction

For program-level assessment, student coursework can provide programs with opportunities to assess student learning using authentic student work products. Coursework that requires students to demonstrate specific program-level student learning outcomes (SLOs) can be evaluated using a program rubric, rating scale, or similar tool to provide **direct evidence** of student performance on those SLOs as part of program-level assessment.

Types of coursework to utilize for program-level assessment will vary, depending on a program's context, and may include papers, presentations, posters, capstone or other culminating projects, portfolios (i.e., a collection of student work), performances, exhibitions, short answer or essay type exam responses, or other types of assignments/activities. With graded coursework (i.e., work products that students complete as a regular part of a course and are graded by the instructor to contribute to the course grade), students tend to be motivated to do well and complete their best work (in comparison to ungraded assignments or activities that students complete primarily for program assessment purposes).

Note: Approaches for utilizing the results of multiple choice type exams are beyond the scope of this resource. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information about utilizing multiple choice type exams as part of program assessment.

Approaches to Evaluating Student Coursework for Program Assessment

There are several approaches to evaluating student coursework that programs can implement to measure student performance on program-level SLOs, depending on the context of the program, coursework, etc. These approaches are described briefly below; see the table on page 2 for additional details.

Note: <u>The following approaches focus on the evaluation of student work to measure student performance on program-level SLOs for use in program-level assessment</u>. The process and tools an instructor uses to grade student work to contribute to the course grade are beyond the scope of this resource and not described below (unless it is explicitly connected to the evaluation of student work for program-level SLO assessment).

1. **Evaluation by the course instructor** (i.e., instructors evaluate students in their own course). Engaging the course instructor in the evaluation of coursework to measure student performance on program-level SLOs can leverage instructor expertise and time for program-level assessment. There are multiple variations of this approach:
    a. While grading an assignment (or soon after), the course instructor can apply a program rubric to evaluate student performance on one or more program-level SLOs.
    b. Soon after grading, the course instructor can use a program rubric, rating scale, or similar tool to evaluate overall student achievement based on student performance on multiple course assignments/activities, for one or more program-level SLOs.
    c. If the course instructor's grading rubric for an assignment is <u>intentionally</u> aligned with a program rubric, those aligned ratings can contribute to assessment of program-level SLOs.
2. **Evaluation by other program faculty**. With this approach, program faculty (other than the course instructor) use a program rubric to evaluate student work products to evaluate student performance on program-level SLOs.
3. **Evaluation by industry partners or other professionals**. In some cases, industry partners or other professionals may be involved in evaluating student work products for student performance on program-level SLOs (typically as part of a hybrid approach, see #4).
4. **Hybrid approach**. A hybrid approach combines the above approaches (e.g., the course instructor and other program faculty members evaluate student work using a program rubric).

Approaches to Evaluating Student Coursework for Program Assessment: Comparison of Key Characteristics

	Evaluation by the Course Instructor	**Evaluation by Other Program Faculty**	**Evaluation by Industry Partners or Other Professionals**	**Hybrid Approach**
Example	Soon after grading, each [M] course instructor applies the program rubric to evaluate their own students' research papers	A faculty committee uses the program rubric to evaluate students' capstone portfolios	Industry partners apply the program rubric to evaluate students' capstone project presentations	The course instructor and other faculty members apply the program rubric to evaluate students' poster presentations
Scope of Coursework	Can allow for a single assignment or multiple assignments/activities to be assessed *As appropriate, instructors can assess student performance based on multiple assignments/activities (e.g., where coursework best aligns with specific program SLOs or to evaluate overall performance based on multiple assignments/activities)*	Typically, a <u>single key assignment</u> is assessed (so that raters don't need to be oriented to multiple assignments)	Typically, a <u>single key assignment</u> is assessed (so that raters don't need to be oriented to multiple assignments)	Typically, a <u>single key assignment</u> is assessed (so that raters don't need to be oriented to multiple assignments)
Coursework Formats	Can allow for a single format or multiple formats to be assessed *As appropriate, assignments/activities in multiple formats can be assessed (presentations, multi-media, etc.)*	Typically, a <u>single assignment format</u> is assessed (so that raters don't need to be oriented to multiple formats)	Typically, a <u>single assignment format</u> is assessed (so that raters don't need to be oriented to multiple formats)	Typically, a <u>single assignment format</u> is assessed (so that raters don't need to be oriented to multiple formats)
# of Raters Assessing Each Artifact	<u>One</u> rater (the course instructor) assesses the student work	<u>One or more</u> raters assesses each piece of student work *With multiple raters, rater reliability can be calculated*	<u>One or more</u> raters assesses each piece of student work *With multiple raters, rater reliability can be calculated*	<u>Two or more</u> raters assesses each piece of student work *With multiple raters, rater reliability can be calculated*
Blind Rating	Rating is <u>not blind</u> (i.e., the instructor knows which student's work they are assessing)	Can allow for blind rating with some exceptions (e.g., live presentations, video recordings)	Typically, rating is <u>not blind</u>	Typically, rating is <u>not blind</u>
Logistical Considerations	Student work does <u>not</u> need to be gathered and distributed for program assessment purposes	Student work must be gathered and distributed to faculty to evaluate, with some exceptions (e.g., live presentations) *For blind rating, artifacts must be coded and de-identified*	Varies, student work may or may not need to be gathered and distributed to raters	Varies, student work may or may not need to be gathered and distributed to raters
Other Considerations	Typically, only a small amount of additional time is needed to evaluate student performance, as the instructor has already read/reviewed the student work; ideally, multiple instructors contribute data from their classes	Raters may need orientation to the assignment and/or using the program rubric	Raters may need orientation to the assignment, and it may be useful to ask external evaluators to help design and/or review the rubric (as they may not share the faculty's performance standards)	Raters may need orientation to the assignment and/or using the program rubric

Additional Considerations for Utilizing Student Coursework as Part of Program Assessment

When determining how coursework might contribute to a specific program's assessment, consider where there are opportunities to collect program assessment data with good representation of majors, what kinds of assessment data can be collected, and who is positioned to participate in the assessment (e.g., instructors, other program faculty, industry partners, etc.).

- Programs should consult their curriculum map and four-year schedule of study to identify courses with opportunities to leverage student coursework for program-level assessment.
  - Depending on what the program wants to learn, assessment can be done toward the end of the curriculum or throughout a program of study. To examine student achievement of program-level SLOs near the end of the curriculum, programs often start by using capstone, writing-in-the-major [M], or other 400-level culminating courses.

- Not all coursework will require students to demonstrate program-level SLOs at a sufficient level for program assessment purposes. Aspects of the selected coursework should correspond with the program-level SLO(s) and the coursework should prompt students to demonstrate those SLOs.
  - Assignment and course grades may differ from program assessment scores (i.e., students with the same final assignment or course grade could vary considerably in their abilities on specific program-level SLOs).

- Using a program rubric that makes clear what is considered to be adequate or exemplary performance can help provide consistency in evaluations. See our Quick Guide to Types of Rubrics for Program Assessment for more information about rubrics for program assessment.
  - Ideally, raters are oriented, in advance, to the assessment and using the program rubric and can discuss criteria and performance levels with colleagues. Additionally, it may be helpful for raters to practice on samples (often as part of a training or norming process). See our Quick Guide to Norming on Student Work for Program-level Assessment for more information.

- If it isn't feasible to assess coursework from all majors, a representative sample of student work can be assessed. Leveraging coursework from required courses (or other courses that most/all majors take) often makes obtaining a representative sample more straightforward. See our Quick Guide to Sampling, Sample Sizes, and Representation for more information about sampling for program assessment.

- Developing a new measure is an iterative process requiring effort to pilot, refine, and scale up to obtain results that are meaningful to faculty. Successful implementation of a new measure typically requires ongoing efforts and regular attention over several semesters, as well as clarifying expectations about faculty roles and participation. *Note: Programs should be sure to update their assessment plan to reflect considerations around when and how the assessment data will be collected, analyzed, and discussed/shared, and who will be involved.*

Additional Resources

- Berheide, Catherine. (2007). Doing Less Work, Collecting Better Data: Using Capstone Courses to Assess Learning. *AAC&U Peer Review, Spring 2007.*
- Suskie, Linda. (2017). *Assessing Student Learning,* 3rd edition, pp. 156-157, and 2nd edition (2007), pp. 27-35.
- Walvoord, B. and Anderson, V. (2010). *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College,* 2nd ed., pp 151-161
- Walvoord, Barbara. (2010). *Assessment Clear and Simple,* 2nd edition, pp 59-63.