

Backwards Design and Authentic Assessment in an Assessment Course (Modeling Best Practice)

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Teaching and Learning Context

Assessment and Accreditation in Higher Education is designed to provide an understanding of current assessment practices, accreditation, and program review in higher education settings. The overarching goal of this course is to prepare professionals to develop assessment plans for continuous improvement of student learning and operational effectiveness. The assessment process is framed using examples from student and academic affairs (including academic programs).

The majority of students enrolled in this three-hour, 15-week course are pursuing M.Ed degrees in Higher Education Administration and Student Affairs, and the balance are from our Ed.S. and Ph.D. programs. Until Spring 2020, the course was offered face to face. In this brief, I will describe how I moved the course online during the pandemic and why I will maintain some of the online components even when the course returns to a face-to-face format.

Challenges and Solutions in Switch to Online Teaching

Even before the pandemic, this course relied on backwards design and performance assessment (also called authentic assessment). The assessments are a key component of the learning experience, connecting theory to practice. Moving to the fully online environment during the pandemic provided me the opportunity to adjust the assessments and course structure. The development of asynchronous content to increase the impact of synchronous class meetings was a central element to these changes.

Strategy: Course Structure (Blending Synchronous and Asynchronous)

The fully online class structure relies upon asynchronous and synchronous components. Prior to class, students read assigned materials and watch one or more asynchronous videos. The videos provide a mix of content review, stories from the field, and humor about the realities of assessment and accreditation. The videos also feature assessment experts across the United States who discuss their work and showcase innovative or interesting practices. Keeping the class topics and structure focused within the online space was a challenge, as it quickly became apparent that using video opens a whole new world of potential guest speakers!

The focus of the synchronous class sessions (via Zoom or Microsoft Teams) is application. We begin each meeting by going through the questions raised by the videos and readings (collected via quiz, described shortly). The remainder of the class session is devoted to activities—either working on upcoming assignments or engaging in activities to practice the knowledge and skills for the module (sample below). Example activities include critiquing and re-writing outcomes, survey items, and data presentations. Students also create new outcomes, design descriptive rubrics, compare and contrast measures, and evaluate accreditation evidence.

Measurement Pros, Cons, and Best Use Activity

Description: It is possible to collect data through a variety of tools, but depending on the purpose, audience, and context, some are better than others. In this activity, you will be asked to provide pros for and cons list for a measurement approach and outline the conditions that promote its effective use.

Learning Outcomes Addressed:

- Evaluate a variety of assessment approaches depending on context
- Analyze the needs of a unit or program to design an efficient and feasible assessment plan
- Synthesize assessment data, communicate the meaning of results, and plan for meaningful change

Measurement Approaches (not a full list but a way to organize the activity):

1. Tests: Objective (developed locally) and Standardized (developed commercially/elsewhere)
2. Portfolios (graded with rubric)
3. Counts, Rates/Percentages, Grades
4. Performance Assessments (i.e., project, recital, research paper in research class) or Observation of Behavior (i.e., internship supervisor evaluation) – both with rating scale or rubric
5. Surveys, Post-program evaluation forms
6. Focus Groups
7. Interviews (one on one)
8. Written materials (papers, essays), Documents and records (syllabi, transcripts, work requests, meeting minutes, logs)
9. Reflections and Journals
10. Classroom Assessment Techniques (one sentence summary, generated test questions, muddiest point)

With your selected measurement approach(es), prepare a response to the following:

What are the pros to using this kind of measure?	What are the cons to using this kind of measure?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••
What kinds of scenario(s)/outcome(s) is this measure best suited to handle?	Identify some actions you can take to implement this approach the best way possible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••

The synchronous class meetings presented a challenge in the online environment. In short, I was seeing a lot of blank tiles and weak engagement. This made sense, as students have different levels of comfort with technology, varying available internet bandwidth, and prefer to engage in different ways (e.g., speaking in breakouts vs. full class, chat vs. un-muting). Through trial and error, four tactics seemed to make the online synchronous sessions more engaging: relying on breakout groups (to make the class feel smaller), keeping the active learning sessions short (followed by full-class share outs), providing detailed instructions for each activity, and using class time for project work. Because the course revolves tightly around the assessments, using synchronous class time for them made students feel better supported.

Strategy: Adjusting Assessments

As previously mentioned, the assessments are a crucial means for practice in this course. The move to the online environment led me to work with a colleague to replace some of the course assessments. I

replaced a large project with a series of module-specific quizzes. Students complete the quizzes after reviewing the asynchronous content for each module.

Module 7 Quiz - Due by Noon (Day of Class)

You will be able to take this quiz twice (your best attempt will count). Answer each question, including the final question.

1 1 point

Match the rubric type to the description.

Analytic/descriptive rubric	Consists of a series of criteria and performance levels, with explanation of the levels for each criterion
Rating scale rubric	Consists of multiple explanations of performance at various levels (one criteria)
Holistic rubric	Consists of a series of criteria with indication of how well something was done
Checklist rubric	Consists of a series of criteria with yes/no answers

2 1 point

For which situation might you use "percentage of problems/cases solved within 24 hours" as a direct measurement?

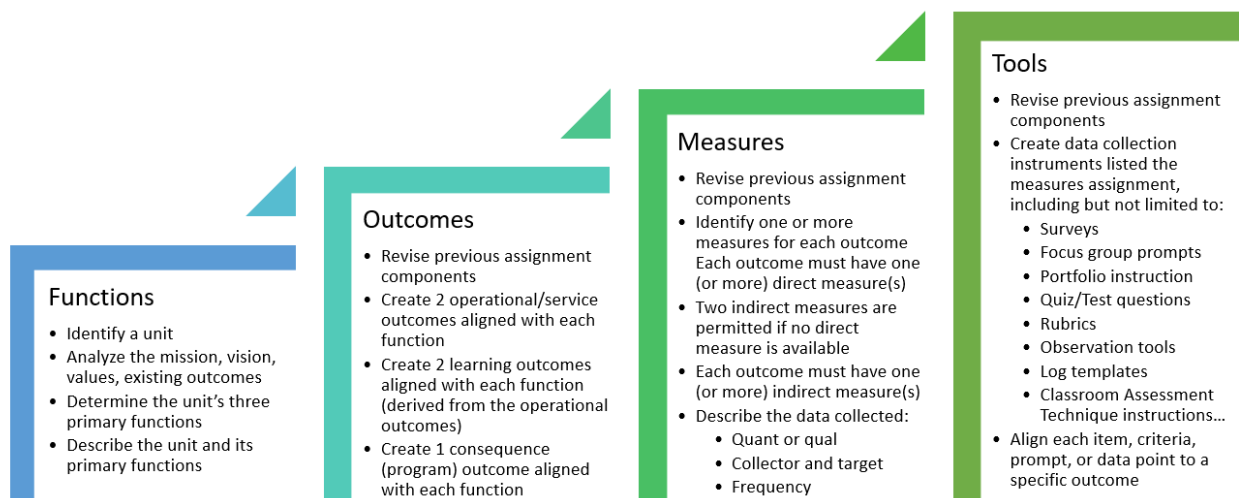
- When you want to demonstrate how fast you are solving problems/cases
- When you want to demonstrate how well you are solving problems/cases
- When you want to demonstrate client satisfaction with problem/cases solutions
- When you want to demonstrate how many problems/cases you are solving

Using a Rubric (Scoring Guide)

- Rubric – A scoring guide or grading criteria, typically a list or chart, crafted to evaluate learning
- Can reduce information into parts and provide feedback
- Includes the items the instructor is "looking for" in the assignment; communicates criteria
- Enhances clarity, speed of scoring, and data
- There is no single RIGHT way to create a rubric, assuming one keeps in mind the rubric's purpose

These low-stakes quizzes provide a sense of how well students understood concepts and processes (knowledge levels: recall, understand, apply) and allow me to adjust instruction to meet students' needs. The quizzes, due shortly before class, also require the submission of a question based asynchronous content. The student-generated questions are the basis of the beginning of each synchronous class session.

The project (assessment plan) remained largely the same but additional collaboration was introduced. Previously a solo project, students now work in pairs to design their assessment plan (outcomes, measures, plans for data presentation, plans for closing the loop) for an office, unit, or program on campus. The plan is submitted in pieces, with revisions occurring after each submission.



The accreditation simulations (new for the online environment) require students to evaluate (real) assessment plans and accreditation evidence against standards. Both simulations occur during a synchronous class meeting (sample below). The assessment plan project and simulations both measure higher-level thinking (knowledge levels: apply, analyze, evaluate, create).

Accreditation Simulation – In Class Activity

Group/Core Component 3.D. The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.

- 1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.**
- 2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.**

Please provide a short summary of assurance argument for these sub-components in your own words (avoid jargon; 2-3 sentences):

What kinds of evidence did the IHE provide in support of these sub-components?

Are there other arguments/evidence you would have expected (or liked) to see for these sub-components?

How persuasive do you feel that the argument was for meeting these sub-components, based on the narrative (assurance argument) and the evidence provided?

- 3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.**

Please provide a short summary of assurance argument for this sub-component in your own words (avoid jargon; 1-2 sentences):

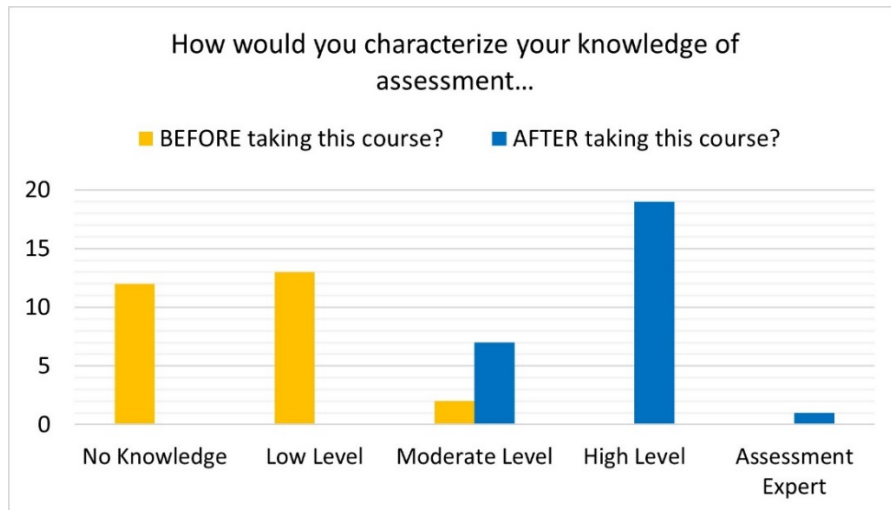
What kinds of evidence did the IHE provide in support of this sub-component?

Are there other arguments/evidence you would have expected (or liked) to see for this sub-component?

How persuasive do you feel that the argument was for meeting this sub-component, based on the narrative (assurance argument) and the evidence provided?

Results and Plans

Data collected in Spring 2021 (N = 27) revealed most students reported a high level of knowledge of assessment.



This finding was particularly exciting, because this means post-course knowledge (and growth from beginning to end) was the same as when the course was offered face-to-face in previous semesters. Further, more than half of the class indicated the video quizzes were *very useful* or *extremely useful*. Even if this class returns a face-to-face delivery, I plan to keep the asynchronous components.

An instructor considering making a similar change should consider three points. First, consider the interaction between course content and assessments. Strategic use of assessment can deepen learning, especially in an online context. Authentic assessments serve as direct evidence of learning and provides students with a meaningful artifact of their own knowledge and skills. Second, consider what your audience might value in asynchronous content. In this course, students always ask “but how does this look in real life?” So that became the focus of the asynchronous videos. Third, use your synchronous class time for active learning and allow students to work on their projects. By doing so, you can provide students with instant support as they put their learning into action. While these changes took significant time, they led to strong student learning and growth.