Chapter VII

Challenges in the Design, Development, and Delivery of Online Assessment and Evaluation

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Abstract

This chapter introduces online assessment and evaluation and explores strategies to overcome challenges in their design, development, and delivery in online settings. It argues that both assessment and evaluation are process-driven, involving many stakeholders including faculty, administrators, and students. This process includes needs assessment, strategies for asking good questions, knowing where to find information, and how to communicate findings in persuasive ways. By developing a comprehensive system, one based on reliable research principles, faculty and administrators can harvest considerable data that enable stakeholders to refine educational programs and maximize learning.

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Introduction

What types of data do you collect to report outcomes and the impact of teaching, learning, and technology programs on your campus? How do you justify new programs or make decisions about improving or terminating less effective ones? Are you and others frustrated with the course-evaluation process at your institution? Are administrators pushing for online course evaluations, and do you know what opportunities and problems accompany the implementation of electronic evaluation systems?

These are just a few issues and concerns that confront educators in our digital world. There are many forms and purposes for assessment and evaluation, and each can provide clues in the mystery of how we can improve. The key is to carefully plan and design the different forms of evaluation or assessment so as to obtain the maximum amount of information—information that may generate new knowledge or verify already known knowledge. This chapter proposes to address the challenges of assessment and evaluation and suggests ideas for meeting those challenges. While some educators view the words assessment and evaluation as interchangeable, we differentiate them in this chapter by the following operational definitions:

- **Assessment**: The process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning (Huba & Freed, p. 8).

- **Evaluation**: The determination of a thing’s value; in education, it is the formal determination of the quality, effectiveness, or value of a program, product, project, process, objective or curriculum (Worthen & Sanders, p. 23).

Student Assessment

Online instructors often are interested in how to assess students’ preparation, how to evaluate their work and effort, how to maintain efficiency with an overloaded schedule, how to grade, and so on. Although instructors are often ultimately responsible for assessing students, they are not the only source. For example, students may assess themselves. Self-assessment will reveal to both instructors and students how much the students have become self-directed.
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