



Chapter I

Continuous Assessment for Improved Student Outcomes: Examples from WebCT's Exemplary Course Project

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Abstract

WebCT views assessment as an activity that is integral to the full scope of the learning process. A variety of methods and strategies are available to course designers and instructors to assess student performance before, during, and after a course has taken place. WebCT provides three major categories of assessment tools (self-tests, quizzes and surveys, and assignments within these tools) and seven types of questions (multiple choice, including true/false; combination multiple choice; matching; calculated; short answer; jumbled sentence; and paragraph). The layout, design, and administration of assessments is flexible through selective release, timed assessments, and the sequencing of questions. Through examples from the WebCT Exemplary Course Project, this chapter reviews the many tools and methods available and describes the assessment, grading, and reporting capabilities of WebCT.

Introduction

Assessments can be an effective way to gather critical information about student and course performance (WebCT, 2001). A variety of assessment methods and strategies are available to course designers and instructors in WebCT. This chapter reviews the many tools and methods available and describes the assessment, grading, and reporting capabilities through examples from the WebCT Exemplary Course Project.

Assessment is often thought of as a tool that measures a student's knowledge of the course content. In contrast, WebCT views assessment as an activity that is integral to the full scope of the learning process. The advent of online learning has opened new methods to assess student performance before, during, and after a course has taken place.

Precourse Assessment

The assessment tools in WebCT can be used in orientation or precollege courses to assess in a diagnostic fashion the students' abilities in specific subject areas. The University of Alberta, for example, is using WebCT Vista to deliver online placement testing for students. Students are given a test prior to coming to campus to determine which course level is most appropriate. This approach is very effective because it helps ensure that the students are in the right courses, and it uses the distance learning aspect to begin the semester effectively. Course pretests can be administered and used to customize the course content and coverage (Vallone, 2004).

Assessment During the Course

Faculty can choose to assess students through a number of methods. Quizzes and other tools can be embedded within the course content to gauge students' knowledge of the material. Subsequent or remedial material can then be selectively released based on the outcome of the assessment. Self-tests and surveys can be used throughout the course to aid instructors in the delivery of course material.

Postcourse Assessment

At the conclusion of the course, traditional assessment methods such as quizzes and exams can be administered. In addition, posttests can then be correlated with pretests to measure student learning. Course evaluations can also be administered to evaluate the effectiveness of the course and the instructor. Finally, the instructor has a number of reports available to evaluate the effectiveness of the assessments.

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