

**Learner-Centered Assessment in the COVID-19 Environment:
Challenges and Opportunities**

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Introduction

For the past four months, faculty have been challenged to maintain rigor and quality of instruction in an unprecedented COVID-19 environment. Faculty have changed the way they deliver courses, using different instructional modes and adjusting assignments and exams to ensure learning objectives are met, properly assessed, and documented. Furthermore, faculty have used both direct and indirect methods to make sure assessments of learning are fair, objective, and meet the goals of instruction. In this abstract, we discuss assessment in the COVID-19 environment. First, we provide a brief overview of assessment methods and examples. Second, we highlight some of the challenges faced in the middle of the Spring 2020 semester as faculty adjusted their teaching during the pandemic. Third, we share examples of direct and indirect assessment methods and discuss how we selected and used various assessment methods midsemester to meet the challenges and uncertainties posed by the pandemic. Finally, we share an initial assessment adaptation tool that will be refined by participants during the presentation and utilized by conference attendees to adapt their assessment approaches to maintain high-quality, learner-centered instruction in future course offerings.

Introduction to Assessment

Assessment methods are tools and techniques used to determine the extent to which the stated learning outcomes are achieved (Suskie, 2009). Assessment methods can be direct or indirect, qualitative and/or quantitative. Direct methods such as exams, pre and posttests, and reflective journals, worked very well in the pre-COVID era. Similarly, indirect methods such as focus groups, interviews, and observations were effective. However, in the post COVID era, we need to reexamine the use of certain methods to maintain instructional quality and student outcomes. Assessment methods, both direct and indirect, that appear promising to use in the post COVID-19 era include: 1) rubrics to assess the depth of discussion threads for an online class, 2) individual assignments and article critiques, 3) continual, immediate, and detailed feedback and reinforcement techniques (Radhakrishna, Ewing, & Thorn, 2019), 4) self-assessments, discussion boards, 5) peer assessments, and 6) rubrics to assess both chat room discussions and quality of interactions (Gaytan & McEwen, 2007). Importantly, however, it is challenging, time consuming, and stressful for faculty to make changes midsemester. Changes can be even more challenging and stressful for students who are used to routine in-person classes, interaction with fellow students, and meeting with instructors. Therefore, educators are in need of tools to maintain quality assessments during uncertain and continually changing educational landscapes. Further, making students aware of the different approaches to assessment utilized in response to changing educational landscapes will alleviate stress associated with unexpected approaches to evaluation.

Presentation Structure

In this “Learner-Centered Assessment” presentation, we will share an example of a course assessment (offered in Spring 2020 at four universities), where assessment methods were changed due to the pandemic. Further, we will introduce participants to an initial draft of the “Assessment

Adaptation Tool.” In this tool, we present the learning objective type and examples of both direct and indirect assessment approaches for in-person and online/hybrid learning environments. During the presentation, we will invite participants to contribute example assessment approaches to be included within the assessment adaptation tool. In this way, the tool will become a product of the participants, not just a tool we have developed to disseminate. Our vision for this collaborative resource presentation is that educators will utilize the tool to adapt their assessment if/when future learning environments must shift between in-person and online or hybrid instruction.

Assessment Adaptation Tool

An initial tool, provided below, will launch the discussion. In the initial tool, we delineate learning objective type. There are three types of learning objectives, based on Bloom's classification of learning domains, cognitive, psychomotor, and affective, each describe below:

- *Cognitive Objectives (Knowledge):* What do you want your learners to know?
- *Psychomotor Objectives (Skills):* What do you want your learners to be able to do?
- *Affective Objectives (Attitude):* What do you want your learners to think or care about?

In addition, we concatenate different assessment approaches by two levels, direct vs. indirect assessment and in-person vs. online/hybrid learning environments.

Learning Objective Type	In-Person Environment		Online/Hybrid Environment	
	Direct Assessment Approach	Indirect Assessment Approach	Direct Assessment Approach	Indirect Assessment Approach
Knowledge	Written Exam	Interviews and Focus Groups	Individual Assignments and Article Critiques	Peer Assessments
Skills	Pre and Post Skill Tests	Observations	Case Study Analyses	Self-Assessments
Attitudes	Reflective Journals	Discussion Groups	Rubrics to Assess Discussion Board Posts	Breakout Room Discussions

Note. Only examples are provided for this version of the assessment adaptation tool as we want to provide an opportunity for session participants to add to this tool to increase collective ownership over the final product.

Assessment Adaptation Tool

Participants will leave the presentation with a tool they helped create which outlines a variety of different assessment approaches useful for direct and indirect assessment for in-person, online, or hybrid learning contexts. It is anticipated that all participants will use this tool to increase the quality of their assessment in the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters and beyond.

References

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