Coping with COVID 19: Lewis University College of Business Experience

By George Klemic

Abstract: Well developed and designed operational policies may help maintain assessment even amid major changes to deal with health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Words: Academic policies, On-line conversion, COVID-19

Lewis University is a private, Catholic and Lasallian University, located in Romeoville, IL, southwest of Chicago, IL. Lewis was founded in 1932 and has approximately 6400 students.

When pondering how COVID 19 affected operations and assessment in the College of Business (COB), I would have to say that, on the surface, the change appeared to be gigantic. The bulk of our course sections were delivered as traditional, on-ground courses. Those all had to be converted to fully-on-line ones. Similarly, the COB was fully invested in assessment at the University level, the COB level, and at the Department level and much of the assessment framework was embedded in face-to-face coursework. We would have to identify and execute steps to ensure that our assessment plans were maintained as courses moved online. From a faculty point of view, the need for change came upon us suddenly, just as it was time to return from spring break.

Then it happened.

In short, the change took a week to transform 157 traditional, on-ground sections into on-line sections. While one might expect such a dramatic change to negatively impact assessment, the change had little effect on the COB's assessment efforts.

How did we manage such a dramatic change with so little negative impact? It did take some effort on behalf of the faculty, but policies and practices that had long been in place facilitated the change. It is worthy of note that long-standing operational policies proved to support assessment.

There were several operational policies that facilitated the change and that supported assessment (see Appendix) The first of these policies required the use of Blackboard shells for each class, so that course materials could be shared, assignments could be submitted, and grades could be provided digitally. As the transition to on-line delivery occurred, all of the courses already had a Blackboard shell with many of the key elements in use.

Because of the Blackboard use policy, a second policy required full-time faculty to become certified in Blackboard. It should be noted that these two policies were enforced by gentle encouragement. As the transition in March occurred, 22 out of 27 full time faculty, and many adjunct faculty already had Blackboard certification. Those that were not certified enrolled in the appropriate training. The Dean and Assistant Dean were the providers of the gentle encouragement.

A third policy spanned operational and assessment concerns. Assignments that would be used as artifacts for assessment of student learning outcomes were to be submitted via Blackboard.

At the time of transition to all on-line sections, the COB was in the middle of the third of three college-wide assessment plans. These college-wide assessment plans were developed with business operations in mind and were designed not as a collection of individual tasks, but as continuing processes that fit into an open system. These plans fit Suskie's suggestion that assessment be: "…part of an ongoing, organized, and systematized effort to understand and improve teaching and learning…". (Suskie, 2009, p. 50) Our assessment plans, for years, have called for the submission of assessment artifacts via Blackboard, as it represented an effective and efficient way to gather artifacts. So, even prior to the transition to all on-line, our faculty were collecting artifacts for student learning outcome assessment in Blackboard, and our students were used to submitting artifacts to Blackboard.

The lesson I re-learned from the COVID-19 situation is to remember that all things are connected, and that well developed and designed policies often cross-support one another.

Reference
Suskie, Linda. (2009). *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

About the Author

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APPENDIX

Learning Management System Minimum Utilization Policy

Rationale
Utilization of the learning management (LMS) system by faculty is necessary so that Lewis University
- Is prepared to maintain instructional continuity in case of emergency or interruption of face-to-face instruction.
- Meets the expectations and needs of students, who rely on access to course documents and information online, regardless of the instructional mode of the course.

Minimum Utilization Policy
For each course that is offered in face-to-face or hybrid format, faculty will minimally do the following within the learning management system:
- Post a syllabus with updated timelines and due dates.
- Create a "contact instructor" content item in the course main menu, so students can easily access information about their contacting their instructor.
- Post one announcement welcoming students and summarizing the information available on the course LMS shell.
- Utilize an electronic means for communicating grades that is accessible on the LMS course shell. Utilization of the grade center is preferred.

Courses delivered in online format will utilize tools and pedagogical approaches identified in the Review of Online Courses (ROC) Rubric/Checklist.

Minimum LMS Competency Policy
So that all faculty develop comfort and competency with the University's LMS, they will
- Complete the self-paced LMS orientation, including the assessments, or
- Demonstrate competency by completing the culminating assessment of the LMS orientation, if they have experience utilizing it.
- Complete the Online Certification Course, before teaching fully online.
- Demonstrate ongoing competency by updating their skills every two years through attending at least one webinar, workshop, or self-paced LMS development opportunity.

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