Teaching and Learning Objectives: 
The First Step in Assessment Programs

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ABSTRACT
Currently traditional institutions of higher learning are facing more robust competition from alternative educational programs and non-traditional institutions offering certificates and degrees. In addition to this competition the programs offered by the traditional institutions of higher learning are being called into question by graduates; the parents of graduates and the potential employers of these graduates. Parents and graduates are questioning the cost/benefit of a college degree and employers are discounting the relevance of a GPA as an attribute for entry level positions. The authors briefly discuss the introduction of the Collegiate Learning Assessment Test (CLA+). The test is designed to be administered to graduating seniors and the test results will serve as evidence that a graduate possesses the skills considered to be essential by potential employers. The authors point out that the CLA+ is a summative assessment measure. They contend that assessment programs must also include formative assessment measures. The authors propose that assessment programs should be a continuing component of each and every class within each and every degree program offered by the traditional institutions of higher learning. Formative assessment efforts must begin at the level of the individual class and must be linked to statements of both teaching and learning objectives relevant to the course content. From an analysis of syllabi that were used in an introductory Marketing course, the authors have chosen to illustrate unsuitable teaching and learning objectives. The authors point out the necessity of informing faculty members about the elements of effective and measurable teaching and learning objectives. The authors then present a series of teaching and learning objectives derived from their experience in revising an important introductory or portal course. Finally, the authors contend that the structure and language of the teaching and learning objectives presented in the article can be generalized to programs and courses in a variety of academic disciplines and offer some suggestions for the conduct of assurance of learning (assessment) efforts.
INTERNAL PRESSURE FOR ASSESSMENT (ASSURANCE OF LEARNING)

Assessment, or better defined as Assurance of Learning Programs, were initially conceived and implemented by institutions of higher learning as a means of empirically illustrating that they were achieving the goals and objectives they had set for their programs. Earlier on, one could say that the impetus for these programs was internally generated. Somewhat later in time, accrediting agencies began to demand that institutions seek initial accreditation or reaccreditation produce a systematic body of findings that clearly demonstrated the linkages between students’ learning or performance outcomes and the goals and objectives the institution had formulated and made public.

EXTERNAL PRESSURE FOR ASSESSMENT (ASSURANCE OF LEARNING)

More recently institutions of higher learning have had to contend with additional external pressures stemming from a number of sources. Because they recognize the importance of the goals and objectives that many institutions of higher learning have designated as critical, government agencies that offer grants and current or potential corporate and individual donors who provide funds for the introduction of new and the maintenance of existing specific or general programs are insisting that institutions demonstrate the effectiveness of funding present evidence of assessment outcomes that indicate the goals and objectives made explicit in their mission statements are being met.

Institutions of higher learning have also experienced an increasing level of dissatisfaction expressed by graduates who find that once deeply in debt (Fitzgerald, 1997) and experiencing limited career opportunities because of a slow growth recessionary economy. These graduates are experiencing a kind of consumerism (Fitzgerald, 1997) or buyer remorse and are evaluating the cost/benefit ratio of some college degree programs as negative. (The Week 2014) As one might expect, these graduates are joined in their dissatisfaction by parents who have had to absorb the ever increasing costs of tuition, fees and other expenses.

Additional competitive pressure comes from the growing popularity of what are known as Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs being offered by some very prestigious institutions of higher learning. Currently MOOCs are offered online and have essentially open enrollment with no limits on the number of individuals who can participate in all or part of the offering. Also to be considered is the growing importance of “for profit” institutions that promote the more focused on line or in resi- dence campuses programs that they offer as having a direct connection with career employment opportunities. (Bady 2013; Savage 2013)

Traditionally considered as feeder schools for universities and colleges, the two year junior colleges, whose programs are funded by governmental agencies, have been advised to adopt a near a near trade school mission and to offer more in the way of employment oriented programs. (Cancino 2013). Robert B. Reich has recently called for schools within the USA to adopt Germany’s two year programs in manufacturing technologies. These programs, beginning in the last year of high school and extending at least one year beyond, have recognized the employment opportunities for those students who are not interested in traditional college and university programs. These programs are reported as having a role in strengthening the German economy. (Belkin 2013) The model for these programs was echoed in a longer article originally appearing in the Washington Post and reprinted in the Chicago Tribune (Schneider 2014).

THE ENTITLEMENT PERCEPTION PARADOX

Student perception of entitlement creates another problem in institutions of higher learning. The rationale for the perception of entitlement seems linked to the ever increasing costs of tuition and related expenses. Students are reported to have adopted a point of view in which they define themselves as “customers” and as such should dictate the outcomes of the educational transactions in to which they enter. (Schaffer, Barta & Stogsdill 2013) On the other hand, in the authors’ experience, faculty members may vary in their expression of opinions regarding entitlement, but most business school faculty members, implicitly or explicitly, regard students not as customers but as the products that the institution produces. Thus the presence of statements of specific learning (performance) objectives, students may tend to construct their own rubrics of fairness and their own perceptions of reality. For example, every faculty member has heard a student complain about a final grade and claim to deserve a higher grade because they studied hard; they were really motivated; they needed to keep their GPA up; they attended most of the classes; they tried very hard during discussion and so on and so on. Where there are defined and implemented objectives regarding the level of performance students are expected to demonstrate, the differences between what the students consider adequate performance and the levels of performance outlined in the course learning objectives may operate to eliminate or, at the least, lessen the entitlement frame of mind.

As mentioned above, students believe that accumulating a high GPA constitutes empirical evidence that they possess the abilities and skills required for entry into their chosen career fields. Some faculty members share that belief and will inflate grades because they think this will satisfy the students’ request and provide them with a competitive advantage in what has recently become a climate marked by greater demand and competition for employment opportunities. The motivation for such grade inflation may, in some instances, be engendered by political correctness or more simply and genuinely by a desire to be of assistance. In either case, or whatever else the motivation for grade inflation may be, the result seems to be the introduction of a paradoxical unintended consequence.

At one time potential employers might have shared a belief in the relevance and for the relevance of the GPA. A sign of such skepticism in recent times, potential employers have, however, reported the experience of finding that students with high GPAs—even those from prestigious institutions of higher learning—cannot demonstrate an acceptable level of proficiency in what the employers recognize as skills such as basic mastery of content; a facility with quantitative methods; critical interpretive thinking and proficiency in both oral and written communications. (Belkin 2013)

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, Belkin (2013) also pointed out that a number of corporations have used assessment instruments of their own origination as a means of assuring that applicants are capable of, for example, writing well and making a rational argument. He quoted a senior vice president of a major corporation as saying that these abilities are often lacking even for students whose transcripts show a record of high grades from prestigious schools. Belkin (2013) also reported that students who had no immediate intention to enter graduate programs had completed the GRE or GMAT and presented the resulting test scores to potential employers as evidence that they possessed critical skills and abilities discussed above.

The COLLEGIATE LEARNING ASSESSMENT (CLA+) TEST

As discussed above there have been reports that potential employers of college graduates have begun to devalue the worth of some college degrees and to express skepticism about the credibility of GPAs offered by applicants seeking employment.

In response to the skepticism surrounding the GPA as credible evidence of learning, there is a movement toward using a standardized post-graduation examination. Just as the SAT is used to establish that an applicant has the skills necessary for admission to a college or university, the proposed standardized test is designed to provide evidence that graduates have achieved a level of mastery of the knowledge and skills frequently specified in institutional statements of assessment objectives and, just as importantly, considered as requisite entry level skills by potential employers. The post-graduation test is called the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) Developed by The Council for Aid to Education. The test has been used by 700 schools as a means of assessing the learning outcomes that are mastering requisite content and skills that are the objectives of higher education. (Klein, Benjamin, Shavelson & Bolus 2007; Chin 2010 Hoss 2012)

The purpose of the CLA+ is to provide a student who successfully completes the test with a benchmarked report. The report can be considered evidence that the student who has taken and passed the test possesses a satisfactory measure of important content, ability in written communication and the capability for critical thinking. If not all, then certainly the great majority of institutions of higher learning, list the development of the aforementioned skills as desirable outcomes of the educational programs that they offer. And as noted above, these are the skills of particular interest to potential employers.

Current plans for the Spring of 2014 call for seniors at 280 cooperating colleges to take the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) test. The test results will serve to supplement the GPA and other experiential evidence that applicants for employment submit as a components of their resumes.

FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT MEASURES

Assuming that the CLA+ test proves to be accepted and effective raises the question of whether institutions of higher learning will decide to adopt the test as a requirement to be completed by graduating students and the resulting score incorporated into the students’ transcripts. A second question deals with whether the schools that adopt the CLA+ would, as a result of such adoption, consider abandoning their own internal assessment efforts and programs. This would mean that the institutions might well come to rely exclusively on the CLA+ and so, in a sense, oust the work involved in providing evidence of the assurance of learning to an outside agency.

With regard to the issue of outsourcing, it is hard to imagine that a standardized test would be accepted as a sort of universal one size fits all measure considered to be applicable to all college or university programs. In an effort to achieve a closer fit between the content of the CLA+...
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The widespread demand of accountability and the accountability for testing that is prevalent today has led to an increased focus on teaching and learning objectives. In order to address this, institutions of higher education must develop and implement assessment programs that ensure the achievement of teaching and learning objectives. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of teaching and learning objectives, their role in the assessment process, and how they can be effectively incorporated into educational programs.

OBJECTIVES

Faculty members need to be aware of their teaching and learning objectives so that they can focus their efforts on achieving them. Teaching and learning objectives are important for several reasons: they provide a clear direction for teaching and learning, they help to align assessment activities with the stated learning goals, and they serve as a basis for evaluating student performance.

ASSESSMENT: A STARTING POINT

There has been a significant shift in the way that assessment is conducted in higher education. The focus has moved from summative assessment, which is used to evaluate student performance at the end of a course, to formative assessment, which is used to monitor student progress throughout the course. Formative assessment is important because it provides feedback to students about their performance and helps them to improve their learning.

IMPLEMENTATION OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

The formative-assessment process begins with the development of specific learning objectives. These objectives should be clearly stated, measurable, and achievable. The objectives are then used to guide the development of assessment strategies and to monitor student progress. The assessment process should be ongoing and should be used to make instructional decisions.

ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

Assessment programs should be designed to support the achievement of teaching and learning objectives. They should be flexible and adaptable, allowing for the incorporation of new methods and strategies as needed. The assessment program should be integrated with the curriculum and should be used to inform instructional decisions.

The process of revising a standardized test by the addition, deletion, or alteration of test items is that it violates the central norms of psychometric testing. If the original test is in any way revised, then the important attributes of its reported reliability and validity which traditionally insure the credibility of the results yielded by the test can no longer be applied. Whenever a standardized test is revised the reliability and the validity measures of the revision must be recomputed. (Campbell & Stanley 1966; Kassarjian1971)

There is an often cited quotation attributed to the Chinese philosopher Lao-tsu that reads: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. In the context of assessment, it is important to start with defined and achievable objectives. These objectives should be specific, measurable, and time-bound.

In summary, effective teaching and learning objectives are essential for the success of assessment programs. They provide a clear direction for the development of assessment strategies and help to ensure that the assessment process is aligned with the goals of the educational program. By establishing clear and achievable objectives, institutions can create assessment programs that are effective and valuable for both students and faculty.
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Table 2A: Some Examples of Unsuitable Teaching (T) Objectives (From a Collection of Marketing 301 Syllabi)

| 1. | Knowledge of how marketing operates in the individual organization. |
| 2. | The ability to apply your knowledge of marketing operations in both the domestic and the international market environment. |
| 3. | An insight into how marketing can help you personally. |
| 4. | You will understand the role of marketing within society and within an economic system. |
| 5. | Enjoy learning how to develop skills in researching about organizations and their industries. |
| 6. | Learn how to present oral and written marketing materials. |
| 7. | Learn basic marketing strategies including SWOT analysis. |

Table 2B: Some Examples of Unsuitable Learning (L) Objectives (From a Collection of Marketing 301 Syllabi)

| 1. | Develop effective oral and written communication skills. |
| 2. | Develop team skills in solving business problems. |
| 3. | Students will develop an understanding of the fundamental upstream and downstream issues that confront firms along the value chain. |
| 4. | Have fun while developing an understanding of the fundamental concepts in Marketing. |
| 5. | Find out how organizations analyze marketing strategies and competitor analysis. |
| 6. | Learn how to present oral and written marketing materials. |
| 7. | Apply the basic elements of marketing strategy to business challenges and exploit the relationship between these elements. |

The problem with almost all of the statements presented in Tables 2A and 2B is that, rather than statements of measurable teaching and learning objectives, they are little more than statements of intentions. They are well meaning statements but as objectives they are meaningless. To be considered as valid, teaching objectives should be broad statements of what the instructor intends to accomplish and include the means by which he or she is to pursue that accomplishment. A valid learning objective is built around the methods and the actions involved in collecting and analyzing all tangible evidence of students’ performance that verify the instructors’ stated intentions. The actions discussed here are illustrated in the classic traditional model of communication which is presented as Figure 1.

The Traditional Communication Model: Teaching and Learning Objectives

Figure 1 represents the traditional phases of the communication model as presented in introductory marketing texts, for example, (Boone & Kurtz, 2012 and Kotler and Armstrong 2013). In the framework of the model the sender (the instructor) encodes the message to be delivered to the receiver (the student). Encoding means simplifying the course materials in a form that the instructor assumes the students can understand. The instructor must choose a medium to use in presenting the materials. The objectives we list in Tables 3A and 3B of this report make specific reference to a number of presentation media. Note that the teaching objectives in Table 3A specify a variety of media choices: lecture discussion sessions supplemented by text materials; readings; case studies; video and other audio visual presentation materials. The students are expected to encode the information presented via these media sources and to provide feedback that validates that the information has been understood. As shown in Table 3B the feedback takes the form of the...
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"demonstrate". It should be noted that the statement of each teaching objective makes a distinction between what is expected of the instructor and what is expected of each student. The learning objectives stated for each individual class are derived from the goals explicitly declared in the institution's mission statement.

The learning objectives stated for each individual class are expected to:

1. Demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills in business practices.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with the basic elements of marketing plans and marketing strategies.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the control concepts involved in marketing planning and programs.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the vital role of environmental scanning and planning assignments; reports and class participation.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of the role of marketing plans and marketing strategies.
6. Develop an understanding of the relationships between marketing and other functional areas of business.
7. Develop skills in scanning the external environment and appraising internal perspectives for measuring the strengths and weaknesses of a business from a marketing viewpoint.
8. Develop skills in the analysis of competition in the planning and analysis of marketing strategy.
9. Develop an understanding of the informational and analytic sources of information necessary to the preparation of marketing plans.
10. Develop an understanding of the critical role of oral and written communication skills in business practices.

Table 3A

As measured by examinations; quizzes; oral and written environmental scanning and planning assignments; reports and class participation, students completing Marketing 301 are expected to:

1. Demonstrate the ability to recognize and to recall basic marketing terms and concepts.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with the basic elements of marketing plans and marketing strategies.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the controllable and the uncontrollable variables relevant to the success or failure of marketing programs, strategies and tactics.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the role of competitive advantage in the formulation of marketing plans, strategies and programs.
5. Demonstrate the ability to integrate concepts discussed in text materials and these same concepts appearing in both academic and practitioner publications and in the popular press.
6. Demonstrate the ability to locate and integrate informational and analytic sources of information.
7. Demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills in articulating business reports.

Table 4

The objectives are consistent with the mission statement; the measures used to establish assurance of learning are consistent with the objectives. An outcome that provides acceptable evidence of the assurance of learning validates the objectives stated for the class and those stated by the institution's mission. In the approach discussed in this paper our objectives deal with three primary elements. We set out to assure that via a testing protocol common to and consistently measured within all sections of the introductory course we could show assurance of Mastery of Content. Further, as shown in Table 4, we set out to assure that within all sections there would be common assignments that would allow us to demonstrate assurance of both Critical Thinking and Improvement in Communication Skills. These objectives are important components our own and of any number of mission statements put forward by institutions of higher learning. Beyond that, as discussed earlier in this paper, these objectives are relevant to the skills that employers evaluate as requirements for career entry and development.

In summary we suggest that, within all academic disciplines, instructors assigned to teach a given class, cooperate by coming to conclusions regarding the common objectives they will work to accomplish and the methods they will use in pursuit of those objectives. And once the teaching objectives are set the instructors must agree on common methods for measuring student performance. The outcomes of these performance measures can then be considered as evidence of assurance of learning. In what follows we add some additional suggestions formulated during the course revision process discussed in this paper.

Other Suggestions:

The institution should make assessment as important an activity as recruiting and development.

The institution must create an organizational and administrative function that oversees assessment programs.

In cooperation with its program and departmental administrators the institution must assure that formative assessment measures are a component of each course.

Departmental and program administrators must assure that, especially for their introductory and portal courses, all instructors agree on both the teaching and learning objectives and on the methods to be used to document assurance of learning.

The Institution should study the outcome of admin-
istrations of the CLA+ examination.

Each department or program should decide on a method for a summative assessment to assure that students preparing to graduate can demonstrate mastery of content. Students who successfully demonstrate a level of knowledge of content and skills prescribed by the departmental or program faculty, should be presented with a certificate documenting that achievement.

Finally, the department and program administrators should require that students maintain an E portfolio of coursework assignments and projects that, along with the certificate mentioned above, can be presented to potential employers as an experiential supplement to their transcripts and resumes.

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