10 Important Assessment Considerations

Before making decisions about moving ahead with or changing testing and evaluation procedures in your Fall 2020 courses, think about each of these factors.

Be true to your course

If your course has featured one particular type of assessment up to now – essays, multiple-choice tests, speeches – it may be more stressful to change to a different type of assessment for the end of the semester. Weigh that potential cost against any perceived benefits.

Focus on your outcomes

In deciding how to assess your students, first take stock of what you have already assessed. If you have good information on the degree to which students have mastered a certain learning outcome, you may not need to assess it again. Instead, focus on outcomes you have not yet evaluated.

Go with the least-stressful option and consider exams or "authentic assessments"

There are many types of assessment beyond exams. You do not have to find the perfect one; the assessment simply needs to determine the degree to which students have achieved course outcomes. In picking "the right" one, err on the side of minimizing stress and anxiety for you and the students. You can even provide students with options if you wish. One alternative to exams is an **authentic assessment**. These are tasks that are given in advance for students to work on and submit later. They are intended to ask students to complete work in a real-world context to demonstrate their learning. For example, instructors might ask nursing students to write plans of care for fictional patients, or they could assign communication students to read about a public relations fiasco and then create a crisis communication plan and accompanying press releases to deal with it. You can read more about authentic assessment and examples.

Remember circumstances have evolved, even since Spring Break

This sounds obvious but our technological, personal, social, and financial circumstances changed in March, and they continue to evolve. Students who had stable Internet access and quiet testing environments before Spring Break may now be relying on spotty wi-fi on a cell phone to complete all coursework. They may also be laid off (or working double shifts), be home-schooling children, and live in a house that is never empty or quiet. Consider the types of assessments they have the literal and metaphorical bandwidth to take. Proactively ask your students about internet stability for testing. Find out if they still have access to the books or other materials you may be testing them on (e.g., were they sharing a book with a roommate or borrowing one from the library?).

Pay attention to accommodations

If you have not taught online and are accustomed to Disability Services administering tests for students, note that you will be responsible for it in this case. You will need to adjust the time limits on the exam, and you will need to inquire about the student's access to a "distraction-free" environment. Normally that is assumed in an online course because students could seek out Cofrin Library, as an example, for such conditions. That is not the case now (see "Circumstances" above). In fact, none of your students may have access to distraction-free conditions. What accommodations may be possible for all?

Think about the validity of your assessment

No test is perfectly valid or reliable. All test scores contain some degree of "error." The validity of a test, or the extent to which is measures the construct intended, can be compromised by many factors. You may want to design an exam to test students' knowledge of personality theories. If a student is taking that test with a 101 temperature, you may not be measuring their knowledge, but rather the extent of their fever and their impaired ability to concentrate. Scores from your typical assessment tools may contain more "error" this semester than usual given our very unusual circumstances and the near certainty that they will not be given under the "ideal testing conditions" of a quiet classroom.

Communicate changes clearly and often

If you opt to make revisions, communicate changes to your final assessments clearly and repeatedly. The following framework is useful for most cases. Tell students the **purpose** for the change (to meet changing circumstances, etc.). Tell them the **tasks** they will need to do to complete the new assessment, and tell them **criteria for success** that you will use to grade their work.

Note that some final exam logistics and guidance about grading have changed

The Provost and Deans have approved changes to the mechanics of final exam week, such as when finals can be given and the minimum window students will have to complete them. Be sure to check the Provost's website for changes. Be conscious, as well, of the resolution related to grading passed by the Faculty Senate at its April 8, 2020 meeting.

Understand that you will not have access to exam proctoring services

Exams will be given online, and UWGB does not have access to proctoring software. If you have concerns about that, there are ways to design exams (or to use alternatives) that can minimize problems. Consult with CATL if you have questions.

Know that you are not alone

The Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, the Office of Distance Education, Disability Services, The Learning Center, and the Office of Student Success are all here for you. Please feel free to reach out to any or all of them.