



STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

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PART A – BY JANUARY 15, 2010:

1. Identify three course outcomes you will assess this academic year:

For this analysis, I will assess three specific course outcomes from my English 102 syllabus:

- A. “comprehending and describing ideas and details from a variety of texts,”
- B. “recognizing, defining and applying relevant concepts to assigned texts,” and
- C. “crafting claims from critical and analytical responses to texts.”

2. Why are these course outcomes being reviewed?

I chose these outcomes because I want to examine the extent to which students in my English 102 class are able to develop their skills in literal and inferential comprehension of literature and use those skills to articulate their own arguable and supportable interpretations of thematic meaning. These skills are central to student success in writing other critical/analytical papers throughout their college careers, so I am concerned about the degree to which my English 102 prepares them for their future academic tasks.

3. To which program outcomes, if any, do these course outcomes link?

Course outcome A (“comprehending and describing ideas and details from a variety of texts”) leads directly to Humanities Program Outcome 1 (“demonstrate literal and inferential comprehension”)

Course outcome B (“recognizing, defining and applying relevant concepts to assigned texts”) leads directly to Humanities Program Outcome 4 (“analyze and synthesize meaning in verbal, visual and/or auditory media”)

Course outcome C (“crafting claims from critical and analytical responses to texts”) leads directly to Humanities Program Outcome 2 (“communicate clearly and effectively in appropriate contexts”)

4. What is the basis for the claims made in #3?

The basis for claim 3.A is that the texts relevant to this assessment are poems that must be read for content (literal comprehension) as well as for underlying significance (inferential comprehension).

The basis for claim 3.B is that the written (verbal) texts relevant to this assessment must be analyzed for their formal/technical characteristics (relevant course concepts), which must then be synthesized into an interpretation of the poems’ thematic significance (meaning).

The basis for claim 3.C is that the crafting of a claim in the context of this assessment is the clear and effective articulation of a supportable opinion regarding the meaning of a work of literature.

5. What methods will be used to assess each of these outcomes?

I will assess for these outcomes by assigning students to write an essay that explores the thematic and formal similarities between two poems of their own choosing by Robert Frost. The assessment rubric for this assignment includes, among other criteria:

Criterion A. “Thesis asserts interpretation of theme in selected works” (this criterion speaks directly to course outcome C above);

Criterion B. “essay demonstrates understanding of theme in selected works” (this criterion speaks directly to course outcome A above); and

Criterion C. “essay demonstrates understanding of form in selected works” (this criterion speaks directly to course outcome B above).

6. What criteria will be used to determine successful achievement for each outcome?

Criterion A is binary: either the essay presents a thesis that asserts a specific thematic interpretation of the works or it doesn't. This criterion measures the course outcome of “crafting claims from critical and analytical responses to texts” in that a thesis is a claim, and an interpretation of theme in literature is only achievable via critical and analytical response to the text.

Criteria B and C are evaluated on a scale of 1-10 (or rather, a scale of 6-10 with evaluation criteria ranging from *unsatisfactory* to *needs significant improvement* to *could be improved* to *good* to *excellent*, and Zero meaning *not present or off task*). This scale, in relation to these criteria, gauges the degree to which students demonstrate their understanding of thematic meaning in literature (a critical response) and formal technique in literature (an analytical response), respectively. Students earning an 80% or higher (equal to *could be improved*, *good*, or *excellent* in qualitative terms) are considered to have achieved the outcome. Students earning 70-80% (equal to *needs significant improvement* in qualitative terms) are considered to be approaching achievement of the outcome. Students earning below 70% (equal to *unsatisfactory* or *not present, off task* in qualitative terms) are considered not to have achieved the outcome.

Each course outcome will be considered to have been successfully achieved for the class if 90% of the students score an 80% or higher on the relevant criteria by the time the final draft score is recorded.

PART B – By April 23, 2010:

7. Was this assessment an accurate indicator of student learning? Why or why not?

Both of these levels of understanding (interpretive and formal – aka thematic and technical) are clearly articulated and understood as cornerstones of the discipline of literature and indeed cornerstones of the disciplines throughout the “arts” end of the humanities. These criteria have been refined and applied in evaluating student work in response to similar assignments not only in my own sections of English 102 throughout the years, but also in sections of English 102 taught by other instructors as well as in other courses in the study of literature taught by myself and others. Allowing for external factors (student attendance, student decisions about whether to write an essay or not, and issues of academic integrity) the results on such an assignment tend overall to yield similar results across course sections and instructors.

8. Based on the data you gathered, analyze students' level of achievement of the course outcomes according to established criteria.

Primary: minimum overall score, rating, response if at acceptable level

Secondary: more detailed minimum sub-scale or item score below which faculty need to improve review to ascertain cause and make improvement

Of the 22 students enrolled in the course at the time I gave the assignment, 19 submitted the assigned essay. Of those 19, 12 submitted essays that achieved the targeted outcomes (scoring 80% or higher) on either the first draft or the revision (but two of these had committed plagiarism and were not awarded grades). Three of 19 submitted essays that approached, but did not achieve, the targeted outcomes (scoring 70-80%) on either the first draft or the revision. Four of 19 submitted essays that did not demonstrate understanding of the assigned task on either the first draft or the revision and were given the opportunity, after a conference with the instructor, to revisit the assignment (all four subsequently created essays that achieved the targeted outcomes). These two students who committed plagiarism were also given an opportunity to revisit the assignment after a conference – one subsequently submitted an essay that achieved the targeted outcomes ethically; the other chose not to redo the assignment.

This case study shows that of the 22 students enrolled at the time of assignment:

- 54% achieved the targeted outcomes after instruction/drafting/revision
- 18% achieved the targeted outcomes after one-on-one instruction
- 14% approached, but did not achieve, the targeted outcomes after instruction/drafting/revision
- 14% did not submit the assignment

Therefore, the success rate for this assessment, based on the criteria set out in #6 above, was 72%. If students who approached but did not achieve the outcome are added, the success rate is 86%.

The students who neither achieved nor approached the outcome represent four students who either simply did not complete the assignment or chose not to take the opportunity to submit a revised assignment that demonstrated academic integrity. The three who did not submit the assignment at all had not been attending regularly, had missed other assignments, and subsequently withdrew from class.

I would characterize this assignment as having a 72% success rate with this group of students – that success having been achieved by a combination of standard classroom instruction (assigned reading, lecture, discussion, peer review and instructor critique) and one-on-one instruction (specific application of targeted skills through additional critique, analysis, examples and practice). My primary concern about the result of this assessment centers around the 14% who approached but did not achieve the outcome (those who scored 70-80% on the targeted criteria).

9. Based on this analysis, what changes are needed (curricular, pedagogical, etc)?

I'm tempted to say that if I just had my students submit three versions of the essay instead of two, then I'd be likely to see an acceptable success rate without the additional one-on-one instruction. However, I'm not convinced that this would really be advisable for four reasons:

- a certain percentage of students would still choose not to do the assignment regardless of how many drafts I assign, leaving the ultimate success rate unchanged;
- past experience tells me that the more required drafts I assign, the less work students put into earlier drafts, gambling on the success of their "final" product and hoping to do less of the heavy lifting on their own;
- I don't know where I would find the time to provide the additional critique/discussion/instruction for a third iteration of each essay in this class;

- a relatively small portion of the class actually needs the third go-round in order to succeed, so it's possible that the current system of triage (working privately with those students who need the most help while other students work more independently) is actually more effective.

One option that I am considering would address the relatively small percentage of students who approached but did not achieve the outcomes through the standard instruction/drafting/revision process: had I given them the same opportunity for one-on-one assistance and additional revision, as I did with the students who failed to understand the assigned task, I am confident their rates of success would have achieved the 80% mark. However, I do have a concern about how much time I can devote to repeated submissions and critiques of essays for students who are progressing but not excelling.

I do think that smaller class sizes would help in this situation – by the time I assigned this essay, I had already lost a few students who had, I think, slipped through the cracks of a busy and crowded classroom. Then a few more slipped through the cracks of a demanding assignment and not enough class time to get their individual questions answered (or, frankly, to ask them). In a perfect world with unlimited budgets, I'd work with, say, 15 or 16 students in a class like English 102, and there would be time in class to work individually and in small critique groups with all of them. Such adjustments could conceivably increase the success rate, perhaps by enough to achieve the 90% target rate, by eliminating at least some attrition.

10. What budget implications arise from these recommendations (staffing, training, equipment, etc.)?

None. The only potential budget recommendation would involve additional staffing in order to decrease class size. However, my sense that student attrition was at least in part the result of class size is only a hunch at this point, given that I didn't have the opportunity to interview those students who had disappeared in order to determine their reasons.