

The Use of the Senior Capstone as Both Assessment and Remediation

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The Purpose of a Capstone

- Assess competencies of critical reasoning and communication
- Synthesize and apply content from courses in the Business curriculum

The Old Model

- Senior research paper
- Presentation during senior research week
- Capstone strategic planning course

Disappointing Results

- Inability of students to design good research projects (gaps in curriculum?)
- Over involvement by Business faculty advisors (who see “their” senior’s projects as reflections of their own work)
- Unwillingness of faculty to fail students for research efforts at the end of senior year

Need for a Change:

But to what?

Assessment Tools in Action at the College

- When developing the outcomes assessment plan for the department in 2001, the faculty created a content exam.
- This exam was used as a pre and posttest for business students.
- Test was taken anonymously.
- Results of tests were used (successfully) to drive programmatic change.

Every year, the faculty saw that
several anonymous students
failed every component of the
content assessment...

And knew that these same failing
students would be marching
across the stage at graduation.

The Decision to Use the Existing Assessment Tool as a Tool for Remediation

- Eliminate the senior research requirement
- Replace it with a three credit “senior capstone experience”
- Use the senior capstone experience to work with individual students with gaps in their content knowledge and communication skills

Content of Capstone Course

- **Content Remediation**

- Students take content assessment.
- A student failing any section is assigned a remedial problem pack to work on over the semester.
- Students either successfully complete the pack or are assigned further remediation.

- **Writing Remediation**

- Every student submits a writing sample.
- The sample is scored according to a writing rubric.
- Over the course of the semester, each student must improve his or her score by 15 points or more.

(I) Goals for the Content Assessment

- ***Programmatic improvement***: Are there some content areas that most students fail?
- ***Student focus***: Students may pay more attention to lower level courses when they know that they will be tested on the material during senior year.
- ***Faculty “last chance”***: The capstone provides the faculty one further attempt to review important concepts with students.

Key Question: How did the students who fail the senior assessment pass the course originally?

Students Who “Forget”

- Students who were initially weak in the subject (earning a grade below a B) usually require remediation because they didn't fully understand the material in the first place.
- Some students who DID earn high grades fail the final assessment because they did not retain the material.

How can a “good” student forget the basic content of an important course?

- Traditional students learn in a “vacuum” and do not have the opportunity to apply what they have learned in a real setting. (Implications for programmatic improvement)
- Students take 18 credits per semester, study for tests, and care only about earning a good grade – not about mastering the content of the course (Implications for programmatic improvement)

(II) Goals for Writing Component of Remediation

- To work one-on-one with every business student to improve his or her communications skills.
- To graduate only those students who can enter the workplace (or graduate school) with clear, error-free writing.

Results of Capstone Experiment

- **Content**
 - With varying degrees of difficulty, students are able to work through problem sets.
 - Each “packet” takes approximately 15 hours.
- **Writing**
 - Remarkable strides for every student
 - All students (so far) have moved to an above average score on their final writing assignments

Student Satisfaction

- Students view new capstone as “fair”
- Students recognize their strengths and weaknesses (while there is still time to address the weaknesses)
- Students learn in a relaxed and nurturing environment because the course is graded on a pass/fail system

Faculty Satisfaction

- Faculty time commitment:
 - Writing component requires four ½ hour private meetings with each senior.
 - Faculty must be prepared to help students with their remedial problem sets.
 - Content assessment must be recreated every year.
 - Problem packets must be recreated every year.

Conclusions:

- In other institutions, comprehensive senior exams usually serve one of two purposes:
 - (1) Determining a student's eligibility to graduate
 - (2) Assessing the quality of the program

Felician's Middle Ground

- Instead of denying students the right to graduate, we use the test as feedback to determine the need for “last shot” remediation
- The Division is hoping that the awareness of a final test will encourage students to absorb and retain course material more effectively.

Issues Still Outstanding:

- Are the content tests valid and reliable?
- How many remedial problem packs should each student be allowed to work on before passing the subject?
- Why isn't there a tighter connection between student grades and performance on the final assessment?

Questions and Suggestions