

EDITORS' NOTES

This volume on on-line assessment might best be considered the third in a *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* trilogy involving elements of assessment and the on-line class. The first (Summer 1998) dealt with classroom assessment and the new learning paradigm. The second (Winter 2000) concerned itself with effective teaching in the on-line class. *Assessment Strategies for the On-Line Class: From Theory to Practice* is based on the premises of the two earlier works and was conceived as a continuing effort to contribute seminal material to this topical trend in higher education.

Purpose of This Volume

Internet technologies have had a profound effect on the way we conduct the business of education. Whether professors are encouraged by internal or external motivators, many are seeking information on how best to explore the realm of the digital classroom.

We began with the assumption that those in higher education who choose to go on-line with their course work need answers to at least two persistent questions: What do we need to know about grading student work in the on-line class? and What are ways we can do it? The purpose of this volume is to gather in one place a wide variety of chapters that address theoretical and practical considerations regarding the assessment of student work in the on-line classroom.

Overview of the Chapters

In Chapter One, Bruce Speck points out that professors can make informed choices about using the on-line medium by basing their instruction on pedagogical theory and evaluating two learning-teaching assessment models. He begins with a review of the brief history of on-line teaching and explains the influences of economics on educational practice.

Marshall Jones and Stephen Harmon use a question-and-answer format in Chapter Two in defining three distinct areas of assessment and identifying the tools with which to conduct the assessment.

In Chapter Three, John Bauer discusses the nature of chatrooms and bulletin boards, two popular Web site environments, and suggests a practical way that professors can apply grading rubrics to student work submitted on-line.

In Chapter Four, Robert Gray explains how professors can either “mark the screen” or use separate attachments in the grading process. He sees e-mail as the analogue of face-to-face conferencing for providing feedback.

John Nicolay tackles the issues surrounding the assessment of group projects in Chapter Five. He identifies five principles for grading the products of student collaboration and offers a cautionary note on handling plagiarism.

In Chapter Six, Jane Puckett and Rebecca Anderson caution that the movement toward on-line learning presents challenges for professional preparation programs, especially in terms of traditional field experiences. They ask if a real-world experience can be effectively monitored and assessed by the professor using the Internet.

In Chapter Seven, James Brown explores key concepts, resources, and strategies that can greatly strengthen the ability of on-line curricular offerings to accommodate learners with a wide range of disabilities.

Mark Canada in Chapter Eight argues that professors can make effective use of e-folios to enhance their students' learning and facilitate their own process of responding to student work. He maintains that e-folios have unique navigational advantages, are generally easier to maintain and share than traditional portfolios, and encourage students to develop additional communication skills.

In Chapter Nine, Michele Ford advises professors with limited technological experience to use features of their existing computer networks to communicate assessment expectations to their on-line students. E-mail and Web postings can serve this purpose.

In Chapter Ten, Joe Law, Lory Hawkes, and Christina Murphy examine the degree programs that are proliferating on-line and discuss the need to employ clearly articulated criteria for their evaluation. Such assessment efforts could begin with "Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs," developed by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

In Chapter Eleven, Brad Mehlenbacher explains user interface and instructional design of on-line materials. He examines such criteria as accessibility, aesthetic appeal, consistency and layout, customizability and maintainability, help, and support documentation, among others.

In Chapter Twelve, Richard Bothel warns that the effectiveness of on-line assessment can be mitigated by several factors: unrealistic appraisal of the potential of on-line education, enforcement of a code of conduct, computer and telecommunication skills bias, and other limitations of on-line media.

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