5

Things You Need to Know When Assessing Online Students

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5 Things You Need to Know When Assessing Online Students

1. Uphold academic integrity.

2. Assess with purpose.

3. Use a variety of assessments.

4. Assess experiential learning.

5. Communicate about assessments.

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1 Uphold Academic Integrity

- It is fundamental to quality education, and one of the first issues that comes to mind when considering implementation of a distance learning program.

- It can be a challenge in face-to-face as well as online classes; yet, it is possible in both venues.

- Remind students of your institution's honor code.

- Have at least one high-stakes, proctored exam.
    - Proctoring may be offered:
        - On campus
        - At approved testing centers
        - Via online proctoring services

- Use plagiarism detection services.
    - Give students the opportunity to revise their work, if necessary, prior to final submission to correct inadvertent plagiarism.

2 Assess with Purpose

- Well-designed assessments promote academic integrity.

- Good assessments:
  - Are purposeful – making the reason for each assessment clear to students
  - Are varied – providing different ways for students to demonstrate their learning
  - Address experiential learning – learning through firsthand experience

- Assessment is the foundation of course design, and should be considered during the earliest stages of planning or revision.

  - Assessments should align with instruction and learning outcomes.

- Assessments may be formative or summative—both are appropriate for most courses.

  - Formative assessments are ongoing, low-stakes assessments, such as self-quizzes or short reflective essays.

    - Use them to guide instruction and learning.

  - Summative assessments tend to be less frequent, and are typically scheduled at the end of an instructional unit.

    - Use them to measure student proficiency.

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3 Use a Variety of Assessments

- There are many more types of assessments besides multiple-choice quizzes and exams.
  - Consider threaded discussions, reports, class wikis, portfolios, etc.

- Distance learning is an ideal environment for varied assessments.
  - Take advantage of the asynchronous online environment.
    - Give students more opportunities to absorb and reflect.

- Change the assessments from term to term.
  - Discourage students from copying from past classes.

- Varied assessments can gauge a broader range of proficiencies.
  - Provide more opportunities for student success.

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4 Assess Experiential Learning

- Experiential learning increases student engagement.
  - Students have more ownership of their learning.
  - They interpret information in the context of firsthand experiences.

- There are many opportunities, such as:
  - Doing a science experiment at home and analyzing the results
  - Touring a local wastewater treatment plant and explaining the stages of treatment
  - Assessing the impact of an invasive plant species and volunteering to help remove the plant from a nearby park

- Assessments may include photo or video documentation.
  - Visual documentation helps to reinforce academic integrity.
    - Students may appear in the photo or video, or simply show ID or a piece of paper with their handwritten name and the date.

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5 Communicate About Assessments

- Clear communication is necessary before and after assessments.

- Let students know well in advance when assessments will be assigned, and when they are due.

- Inform students from the beginning of the course how you will determine their overall grades.

- Scaffolding with feedback and/or rubrics is useful, particularly for ongoing or complex projects.

- Offer timely, personalized, and supportive feedback on assessments so students know you value their learning.

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