Best Practice: Evolution of Course Level Assessments in an Online University

Our best practice is a process that allows the university to assess student performance and improve course content and instructor performance in a near-seamless manner. The conference presentation will include a power point presentation and demonstration of our course management system, online programs, rubrics, and processes developed to achieve our best practice. Future plans based on current data interpretations will also be discussed.

As a result of the university’s initial accreditation process, our online university developed an institutional assessment plan. Initially, this consisted of Program Level Assessments (PLA). Course instructors were directed to complete an additional assessment for each student at the end of the term to determine the student’s mastery of each program outcome covered in the course. This assessment occurred in a university system separate from the course management system (CMS). Students were selected randomly for assessment by this system. Review of the first three year’s PLA results led to the decision that a more detailed assessment could be achieved by looking at students’ mastery of individual course outcomes, which are mapped back to program outcomes. This second generation of assessment is called Course Level Assessment (CLA). By integrating CLA with the CMS, instructors are no longer required to exit the CMS and perform a separate assessment for each student. When the instructor grades an activity that has been mapped to a course outcome, the grading rubric for the activity automatically calculates the student’s mastery of that outcome. The instructor then enters the scores in the course grade book. At the end of the term, CLA scores are harvested from the grade books by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, which then analyzes and reports the outcomes to the administration and faculty for use in institutional and program analysis, course improvement and instructor training. This process does not involve instructors completing an additional assessment of the students and may increase the validity of the results because the CLA occurs simultaneously with regular course content grading. In order to implement CLA, it was necessary to modify all existing courses to ensure that each course outcome was mapped to a specific activity. Course grade books were revised to include the CLA scores, following specific taxonomy developed so the data harvester could correctly distinguish the CLA scores from course grades. Analytic and holistic grading rubrics were developed, which will be described and demonstrated. Pitfalls occurred when assumptions were made about which department would be responsible for providing faculty training on the new assessment process. The re-accreditation visitation team looked very favorably on the university’s CLA process. CLA will allow the administration and faculty to make programmatic and curricular decisions that are based on hard data, rather than hunches and feelings.