Educational Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE
Tips & Strategies
Assessment Series, Part III: Assessing Student Performance--
Formal, Summative

In Part I of our series on Assessment (April, 2016), we looked at the theory and purpose behind assessment. We laid out assessment on a matrix and introduced the various types of assessments we should encounter. Last month, we went more specific and addressed the type of assessment that should be most prevalent in our courses---Informal, Formative. If you missed either of these editions, you can find them at http://www.soc.mil/swcs/esc.html.

This month we'll look examine the type of assessment that is most distinct in our courses as it is usually what we assign a grade on or what we deem a gate---**Formal, Summative**.

When you hear these terms paired, you may think of the ISAP---the Individual Student Assessment Plan. At the SOCoE, the ISAP lays out the plan for how a student will be assessed in a course. Just by nature of writing this assessment plan down makes it a formal plan. **Formal Assessment** is typically systematic and preplanned and has specific criteria for interpretation.

Now, if you are following our series closely, you might be able to conceptualize how you can have a *Formal, Formative* assessment just as easily as you can have a *Formal, Summative* assessment (the crux of this edition). How one uses the assessment results makes the difference between Formative and Summative come alive.

- If the assessment results are to **make changes and improve the learning process**, then it is Formative.
- If we use the results as a **final measure or evaluation** of how students have fared, then it is Summative.

Summative Assessment: a measure used to evaluate student learning at the end of something (summation).

Formal, Summative Assessments come in all shapes and sizes. Most of us are familiar with final examinations or papers. Instructors teach/instruct/facilitate. Students learn. Formal (official/scheduled) assessments are given in order to determine if the learner has mastered the materials or skill.

<mark>*Cut and dried, no need to write any more, correct? Too easy.*</mark>

<mark>*Not exactly.*</mark>

Much the same as military leaders worry about "Mission Creep," so do instructional leaders worry about "Assessment Creep."

Educational Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE
Tips & Strategies

Assessment Creep

So let's look at the phenomonon that I just named, *Assessment Creep.* Not a guy with wire-rimmed glasses who resembles Snodgrass on *Willie Wonka*, but more of the entrance of more and more evaluative scores and more and more tested gates without a clear call from the course Terminal Learning Objectives.

In plain terms? Sometimes we end up assessing and evaluating student performance on standards that are not actually part of the course Terminal Learning Objectives. Why?

- *Maybe it used to be in there, but the course TLO's changed – but the assessment did not.*
- *Maybe it is a "good idea"*
- *Maybe … "We've always done it that way."*

In any case, it is incumbent on instructional leaders, instructors, and training developers to continually review, analyze, and validate the summative assessments associated with a course. If we don't do this, we often end up with assessments unrelated and disconnected to the actual learning objectives and course intent.

> *Critical Tasks or Knowledge are identified by the force. These are translated into Learning Objectives for the schoolhouse environment during the design and development phase. The assessment associated with the course are directly related to these Learning Objectives. That is way it should work.*

One more possible pitfall – "Mismatched Assessments"

Many times the intent and/or form of assessment does not "match" the specific terminal learning objective. Perhaps we test Land Navigation skills with a multiple choice Map Reading test. Or, we might test knowledge of the phases of UW with a 12 mile roadmarch for time. Okay, those examples may be a bit extreme, but you get the picture?

More realistically, we might test a student's ability to conduct Mission Analysis (which deals with the Learning Level of ANALYSIS) by having them present a Mission Analysis Briefing that tests whether or not they can follow a specific process (which deals with the Learning Level of APPLY). In other words, we write a TLO that says that we will evaluate a student's ability to *analyze*, but we design an assessment that evaluates the student's ability to *apply*. It may appear to be pretty close, but words matter. ==Are you specifically testing what your learning objective requires?==

Wrapping it up

The force decides the critical tasks that must be achieved. The schoolhouse decides how this is taught and how it is tested. Bottom line: Formal, Summative Assessments are important components of a course and should be reviewed periodically for validity.

Assessment Series
April: Part I: *What it is, and what it's not.*
May: Part II: *Assessing Student Performance*
June: Part III: Assessing Student Performance (Formal/Summative)
July: Part IV: Assessing Instructor Performance
August: Part V: Assessing Program Performance

Join us again next month for Part IV of our series as we delve into the realm of assessing instructor performance.