**April 2021**

*Please share with your faculty:*

**The importance of distinguishing between program assessment outcomes and assignment grades**

Often student grades on course assignments become conflated with program assessment outcomes. It is important to separate these two results because they not only have different purposes, but they may be measuring different or additional criteria.

The purpose of program assessment is to measure specific, student-learning objectives that the program aims to accomplish within different program courses. Each program-level, student-learning objective should focus on one, specific observable behavior that the program wants students to be able to do as a result of their program experience. As a result, program assessment should focus on providing metrics for gathering evidence about the extent to which a program-level, student-learning objective was achieved. Thus, the results collected and reported should focus only on measuring that one specific skill. On the other hand, assignment grades reflect students’ performance on multiple assignment criteria, which may or may not include the program-level, student-learning objective as one of many desired criteria.

For example, if a program’s student-learning objective is for students to be able to evaluate scientific research, there are different assignments that can be used to measure this objective. One assignment might ask students to locate different scientific articles, and to orally present and evaluate those articles using PowerPoint. Another assignment might ask students to write a paper where they must critically evaluate specific scientific articles. Although both assignments are measuring the targeted, program-level, student-learning objective, each assignment is also measuring additional criteria. In the case of the oral presentation, students’ final grades on the assignment might include additional criteria such as their ability to locate recent empirical research, organize their ideas, effectively communicate their ideas using PowerPoint, and publicly speak in front of the class. In the case of the paper assignment, additional assignment criteria that make up their final grades on the paper assignment might include students’ ability to write coherent sentences and paragraphs, organize their ideas in writing, use correct spelling and grammar, adhere to APA format and citation guidelines, and turn in the paper assignment on time. Students’ final grades on each assignment provides students and the professor with feedback about how they performed on the assignments as a whole. Using students’ assignment grades for program assessment reporting purposes is problematic because the targeted program, student-learning objective is being confounded with the other assignment criteria that makes up students’ final assignment grades.

One of the most effective ways to resolve this issue, and separate the particular program-level, student-learning objective from the other assignment criteria is to create an analytic scoring rubric. This rubric should be used to evaluate students’ performance on all of the expected assignment criteria, including the targeted, program-level student-learning objective as one of many criteria. This way, programs can then analyze students’ performance on each individual criterion, and report on how students performed on the specific program-level objective separate from the other criteria. Using an analytic scoring rubric also provides the students and the professor with more concrete feedback about which specific skills are areas of strength and are areas in need of improvement.

**Check out!** Moore (2020). Assessments by design: Rethinking assessment for learner variability. *Faculty Focus.* Retrieved March 2, 2021 from https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/assessments-by-design-rethinking-assessment-for-learner-variability/

**Please share examples** of effective program assessment methods your program is utilizing and I will feature those examples on [YU’s Learning Assessment Website](http://yu.edu/provost/assessment/).

**Please contact me** if you have any questions about your Spring 2021 assessment activities.