

Involving Students as Partners in Implementing Outcomes-based Approaches to Teaching and Learning



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Involving students in outcomes-based approaches (OBA) to teaching and learning serves several important functions:

- It helps transform students from being passive learners or “consumers” into collaborative partners in their own education.
- It introduces students to the rewards and responsibilities of peer review in scholarly and scientific communities.
- If solicited properly, it provides a valuable source of feedback for improvement of courses and departmental programmes.

Methods for involving student in outcomes-based education:

1. Student evaluations of courses and instructors
2. Peer review of student assignments
3. Exit interviews in the departmental major or programme

Student evaluations in outcomes-based assessment



End-of-semester student evaluations are a necessary tool for assessing the success of courses and instructors. Yet like all methods for judging outcome, they must be taken with some caution.

- The appreciation by students of the lasting value of a course is not always best assessed at the end of the semester when the demands and pressures of that course are at their greatest.
- Student reactions can at times seem capricious, misinformed, or unhelpful. Yet their notions of constructive criticism often come from instructors' comments on their own work.
- Questions on the evaluation forms tend to guide answers. Instructors who “teach to the evaluation” run the risk of teaching in a way that seems mechanical or uninspired.

Ways to improve the use of student evaluations:

1. Instructors should write their own self-evaluation after each course and include it with the student evaluations for later review.
2. The use of *midterm* student evaluations can help improve the course while it is in progress rather than the next time it is taught. This also demonstrates to the students that their feedback is taken seriously.

Judge not, lest ye be judged?

The pressure on instructors to receive positive student evaluations can be enormous since these play an essential role in the review of individual staff members for contract renewal and promotion.

However, there is no firm evidence to suggest that easy grading or undemanding courses are actually rewarded with higher ratings on student evaluations. Fairness, clarity of expectations, and quality of instruction are all greater factors.

Peer review of student performance

Having students assess each other's performance is a particularly valuable way to...

- Move away from the teacher-pupil dichotomy and create a more collaborative class environment.
- Demonstrate to students that their informed opinions matter and that their classmates can benefit from their feedback.
- Teach students about the importance of peer review in research and scholarship.
- Increase the quantity and quality of useful feedback on student work.
- Improve the quality of final assignments by students (theses, research papers, presentations, lab reports, etc.).

Factors in using student peer review:

1. **Class size.** Classes should be broken up into small groups (five students maximum) to keep the amount of work at a manageable level.
2. **Class level.** Peer review is more appropriate for advanced students.
3. **Training students to give feedback.** Early in the course students should be asked to read book reviews and other models for giving thoughtful and constructive feedback.
4. **Instructor evaluation of student feedback.** Students should be informed that their review and comments on each other's work are factors in assigning course grades.

Peer review of theses in humanities and social sciences

1. Students are put into peer review groups of five each. They prepare and distribute five copies of their thesis drafts (one for each student and the instructor) and then take a week to read them and prepare written comments.
2. Each group meets and together the students discuss each draft. The student being evaluated is given an opportunity to respond to questions or comments. The instructor participates as merely one more peer reviewer.
3. Each student returns copies of the draft with comments and suggestions to the student being evaluated.

Benefits of peer review:

1. By assessing their peers' work, students increase self-reflection and improve their abilities at critical inquiry and analysis in their own work. Their writing improves as well.
2. Students gain appreciation of the proper way to make informed judgments and to comment on other's work. They understand better the comments from instructors on their own work.
3. Students gain a sense of their importance in helping improve the performance of their classmates as well as an appreciation of the help and support they have received.

Exit interviews in the major or programme

Many departments in US colleges and universities conduct exit interviews with graduating students in the major.

- Each student meets individually with a member of the department staff. They chat briefly about the student's experience in the major.
- Students complete anonymous forms and the results are compiled into one report and reviewed by the department at the start of the new academic year.
- The reports are useful for planning long-term changes to the major, course offerings, capstone courses, areas of expansion or retrenchment.

Benefits of exit interviews:

1. As with the course evaluations, exit interviews demonstrate that student feedback is valuable and taken seriously.
2. Reflecting on the full breadth of a major in their final days at university allows students to be more deliberative and wiser in their responses than in individual course evaluations.
3. Exit interview files are useful data for outsider reviewers during departmental assessments and accreditation.

Final thoughts

Incorporating students as partners in OBA helps move them away from the didactic pedagogy of their earlier schooling and toward a model of education more in keeping with the scholarly communities which their instructors inhabit.

Guiding students in their critique of each other's work can also be an education for instructors.

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