

Learning A Lot Without Wasting People's Time: Assessing the First-Year Seminar

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Learning A Lot Without
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Seminar

Overview

- The Assessment Trade-Off
- Challenges in Assessing the First-Year Seminar
- Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model
- Other Models

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The Assessment Trade-Off

Robust Information
v.
Efficient Administration

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The Assessment Trade-Off

Robust Information
v.
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Write down an example of this
trade-off from your work.

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Challenges in Assessing the First-Year Seminar

- Split Personality
- Staffing Challenges
- Differentiated Content
- Others?

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Challenges in Assessing the First-Year Seminar

The Assessment Trade-Off is
exacerbated.

Robustness: Complicated course →
Ambitious assessment

Efficiency: Reluctant instructors and
students → Efficient assessment

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Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

- Context
- Questions
- Multi-method assessment model
- Findings
- Potential benefits of the model
- Potential weaknesses of the model

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Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

Context

- Washington & Jefferson College
- Freshman Forum
 - Full academic course
 - Common content
 - Common examinations
- Pilot: "Reacting to the Past"
 - 7 sections (out of 28 total)
 - 2 simulations (Ming Dynasty; India in 1947)
 - Common and differentiated content
 - Common examinations

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Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

Questions

- Were "Reacting" students more engaged (than their "Traditional" peers)?
- Did "Reacting" students learn as much?
- Did "Reacting" students like the "Reacting" curriculum?

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Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

Three-pronged Model

- Student course evaluations
 - Targeted questions—focused on course learning outcomes
- Faculty feedback
 - Observations of student engagement and learning
 - Own perceptions of "Reacting" curriculum
- Embedded essay review
 - Samples of graded final essays from both midterm and final examinations
 - Reviewing team

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Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

Findings

- Student course evaluations
 - Students reported that "Reacting" better helped them achieve liberal arts objectives of Forum.
 - "Reacting" students reported more demanding workload and greater personal effort.
 - Students preferred the "Reacting" track—even beyond the "Happiness Gap."

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Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

Findings

- Faculty feedback
 - Faculty were asked to compare relative learning and engagement from *before* and *after* the midterm.
 - "Reacting" faculty reported greater student learning and engagement.
 - Vast majority of faculty wanted to keep teaching in their own track.

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Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

Findings

- Embedded essay review
 - Reviewing team scored three criteria:
 - Treatment of the provided quotation
 - Integration of course texts
 - Written style
 - Midterm provided the baseline
 - “Reacting” students did better on midterm.
 - Compared results of Best, Middling, and Worst essays separately

Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

Findings

- Embedded essay review
 - The Best and Worst students fared best in “Reacting.”
 - The Middling students fared best in “Traditional”

Data


Midterm-to-Final Comparisons: “Traditional” v. “Reacting”:

“Traditional” Students

	Quotation	Integration	Style	Compiled
Best	0.07	-0.43	-0.21	-0.57
Mid	1.29	-0.14	0.36	1.5
Worst	-0.36	-0.29	-0.57	-1.21

“Reacting” Students

	Quotation	Integration	Style	Compiled
Best	-0.5	0.36	-0.07	-0.21
Mid	-0.71	-0.07	-0.29	-1.07
Worst	0.43	0.86	0.36	1.64

 = higher score. Positive numbers mean improved performance on Final.

Case Study: Multi-method Assessment Model

Findings—Possible hypotheses?

- Best students benefit from the extra challenge of “Reacting.”
- Worst students benefit from the different format of “Reacting.”
- Middling students benefit from repeated practice of a familiar method.

Case Study: Potential Benefits of the Model

- Balancing the Assessment Trade-Off
 - Robustness:
 - Multiple angles on the same question
 - Quantitative and qualitative responses
 - Efficiency:
 - No extra work for students
 - Almost no extra work for faculty
 - Limited administrative burden

Case Study: Potential Weaknesses of the Model

- Is it sustainable? Can it produce longitudinal results?
- Inter-rater reliability in reviewing the essays
- Possibility of mixed results
- Can it inform institutional decisions?

Other Models

- What are some other models that you are using to assess first-year seminars?
- Are there other ways that people are using multi-method approaches?
- Are there other strategies that you use to combat the Assessment Trade-Off (Robustness v. Efficiency)?

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Thanks!

To continue the conversation, contact me:

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