**EVALUATING A CURRICULUM: HOW CAN WE KNOW WHAT OUR STUDENTS ARE REALLY LEARNING?**

**Abstract**

Faculty members are rarely able to assess the impact to student learning that occurs over several semesters of courses. While AACSB accredited schools do engage in formal curricular evaluation the Assurance of Learning (AoL) process is often performative and generally fails to engage all of the faculty members who contribute to student learning throughout the curriculum. This session will foster a discussion of: 1) the impact we as faculty members wish to have on our students beyond what they can learn in an individual class and 2) methods we can employ to meaningfully measure the success of a curriculum.

**Keywords**

Curricular evaluation, student impact, performance measurement

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Student impact is critical within our work, but how do we know the impact we are having on our students throughout the curriculum? Many faculty members work in relative isolation and seek to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and create experiences for learning and evaluation within the confines of a single semester. In this session we want to discuss two key questions. First, *what impact do we wish to have on students? What specific KSAs are we seeking to instil through our curriculum?* And then, *how do we know if we’ve been successful—in what ways has our curriculum influenced student KSA development?*

This session will frame a discussion about our core learning goals for students and better ways to integrate learning and assessment across the curriculum so that we can better understand whether our students are gaining the KSAs they need to be successful after graduation. The presenters recently redesigned the entrepreneurship curriculum at their institution, scaffolding experiences and identifying key skills to be taught at each level, and will share their experience (and challenges) in seeking to design a meaningful assessment of student learning using a pre-test and post-test. Our goal for this session is to have a discussion of what we actually want students to learn, how we know when they are successful, and if that success is due to our intervention or whether successful students entered the curriculum with more of the desired skills and mindsets than unsuccessful students. This session is open to anyone with an interest in discussing student learning across the curriculum, but would likely be best suited from people from smaller programs who have the ability to collaborate with colleagues to create a consistent course design and evaluation across sections and levels.

**Theoretical Foundation**

Pedagogical research in management education is often limited to the effectiveness of individual experiences within the classroom as opposed to evaluating the curriculum as a whole (Ritter, Small, Mortimer, & Doll, 2017). There are few resources that look at curricular efforts holistically evaluate skill development that encompasses learning across a series of courses.

AACSB accredited schools are required “integrate assurance of learning into their curriculum management processes“ (AACSB, 2013: 4) and requires a procedure for curriculum development, course development, course delivery, and assessment and assurance of learning (AoL). For schools engaging in this process, student learning goals are developed as are assessment methods. Each school creates their own system of goals, evaluation, and how they will revise their curriculum if the evaluation indicates revision is needed. Often the AoL process feels distinct from the teaching process, performative, and disconnected from the individual instructor’s goals. Quantitative exams like the Educational Testing Service Major Field Test (ETS MFT) are a popular mode of measuring summative student achievement in AASCB accredited schools (Barboza & Pesek, 2012), but fail to provide the granularity of specific skills beyond broad topical categories (e.g, economics, management). In our personal experience, scores on these exams have been discussed at length only with the faculty members on the accreditation committee and those teaching the capstone course in which the assessment takes place, as opposed to including the entire faculty contributing to the curriculum. They are designed by an outside party and play a key performative function for the school (Burke-Smalley, 2017) and often feel removed from individual curricular goals, particularly those relating to building mindsets and soft skills.

We believe that there should be some way of evaluating student development across the curriculum that is distinct from the more general process of accreditation. The discipline of entrepreneurship provides a particularly good illustration. First, entrepreneurship is largely unexplored in the ETS MFT. Second, pop-culture outcomes associated with entrepreneurship – students launching for-profit or non-profit organizations from their dorm room or shortly after graduation – is considerably out of line with empirical data. Indeed, only 3 in 1,000 college graduates found an organization in any given month (Kauffman Index of Startup Activity, 2017), while the 20-35 year old age bracket represents fewer startups relative to older age groups. In short, much like students studying other areas of management, students graduating in entrepreneurship will develop careers across a wide variety of paths that often do not match stereotypes and ETC MFT categories. As a result, we are currently in the process of refining a pre-test and a post-test to evaluate our entrepreneurship students’ development of skills (e.g., spreadsheet proficiency and database familiarity), knowledge (e.g., pattern and opportunity recognition), and mindsets (e.g., creativity and tolerance for ambiguity) relevant to success across many career paths and have found this to be a rich topic that we would like to explore with a broader audience.

We feel that this discussion can create a space for other members of our community to think more explicitly about the skills, knowledge, and mindsets they would like their students to leave their program with, how to measure those goals, and by extension consider how the learning experiences in each class within their major builds towards these goals.

**Session Description**

This session will be led by two faculty members who have worked to develop a scaffolded entrepreneurship curriculum who are seeking a way to measure individual student outcomes across the curriculum. The session will seek to build a discussion around three key learning objectives: 1) *identifying the KSAs faculty members want students to gain, 2) considering methods for curricular evaluation that measure those KSAs, and 3) reflecting on ways to effectively integrate and scaffold those KSAs into learning opportunities across the curriculum*.

Session timeline:

1. Introduction and framing 10 minutes
   1. Ask each person to introduce themselves and answer 3 questions (record the first and third on the board for discussion later in the session):
      1. What about this topic most excites them?
      2. What is their institutional context (subject area, size of department, number of students etc.)?
      3. What seems most challenging about assessing across the curriculum?
   2. Share our motivation for the session and our experience in designing first the curriculum and now the assessments
2. KSAs 15 minutes
   1. Discuss curricular goals
      1. Ask audience: *What do you think students graduating from your program should leave with? What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you view key to their success after completing your program?*
      2. Follow up: *How do we prioritize these?*
      3. Follow up: *Are there areas of consensus?*
3. Measurement methods 15 minutes
   1. Discuss current methods of assessment
      1. *What are schools using?*
      2. Benefits and challenges of these systems
   2. Discuss aspirational methods of assessment
      1. Ask: *How do we measure the goals we just discussed?*
      2. Ask: *Do our current methods capture these?*
      3. Identify potential ways of measuring the core areas of consensus
4. Scaffolding experiences 10 minutes
   1. Individually reflect on what kinds of experiences would help reach the curricular goals and think about where they would fit within your course sequence
   2. Discuss this with a partner, partner groups will share out with the group
5. Wrap up 10 minutes
   1. Ask: *What from this session will you take back to your university?*
   2. Ask: *What challenges do you foresee in bringing these pieces back? How can you overcome them?*

**References:**

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