Integrating Choice into Course Assessment

Guidance from a LITE Grant funded Study

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Contents

Background

Assessing student learning is an important facet of pedagogy in higher education. Applying the principles of student-centered learning in course assessments is one way to create an engaging learning experience. In higher education, there is a growing push to enable students to make their own choices, to exercise control over their own learning within the confines of the course.

- Student choice builds ownership over the learning process.
- Student choice allows students to display their learning in the way that they feel best represents their knowledge.
- Student choice enforces true differentiation.

Students come from a range of backgrounds, skills, motivations, and experience with different assessment styles. Properly designing a differentiated education experience should consider many options.

This guide is designed for instructors and trainees who are interested in diversifying their course assessments to incorporate student's choices. The guide encourages the use of course design principles and moves through some examples of potential application of students' choices and considerations for their implementation.
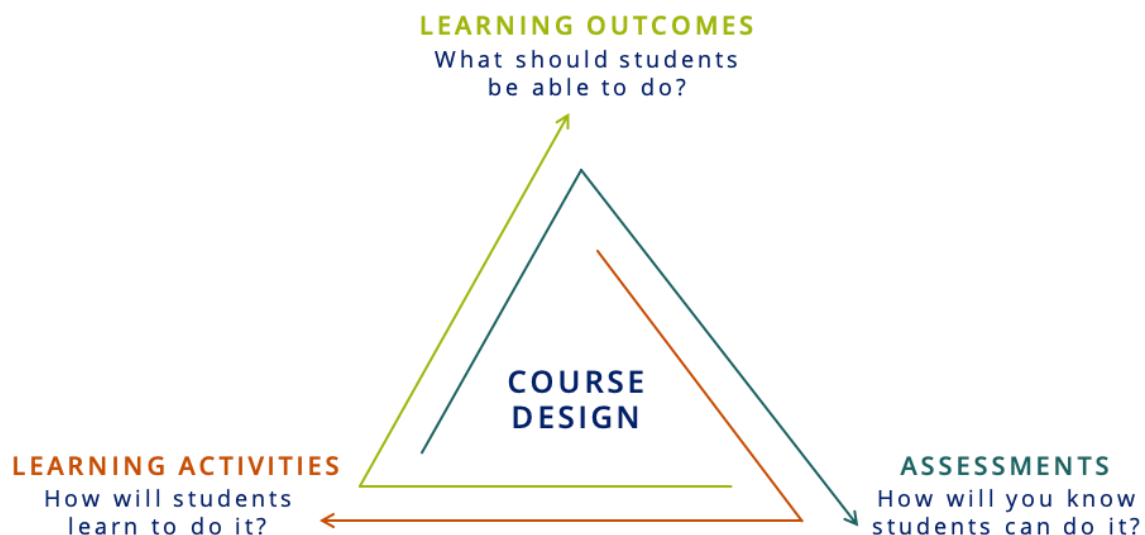
Differentiating assessments

Instructors help diverse students to successfully demonstrate their competencies in particular ways that are fitting and effective for them. By providing various assessment methods/activities appropriate for particular types of students, the teachers are able to meet the students' individual needs, thereby helping them to be successful in their learning.

https://abdao.wordpress.com/2015/07/18/differentiated-assessment/

Course Design

The course design process involves intentional and deliberate planning in order to create a course that best supports students. Using a course design process that helps align course outcomes, assessments, and teaching and learning strategies helps you, as the instructor, to address the following three questions that are the basis of good course design:

- What do I want students to know?

- How will I know that they have learned it?

- What techniques/resources will I use to share information?

LEARNING OUTCOMES
What should students
be able to do?

COURSE DESIGN

LEARNING ACTIVITIES
How will students
learn to do it?
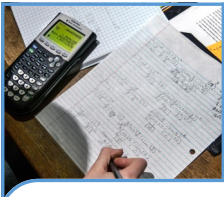
ASSESSMENTS
How will you know
students can do it?

A **learning outcome** is a statement of exactly what your students should know, value, or be able to do after completing your course, or at specified times during your course. Learning outcomes are designed with action verbs aligned with cognitive operations from lower order (knowledge) to higher order (synthesis/evaluation).

In turn, your **assessment** tools should support and enable these demonstrations of learning. The most effective way to meet the diversity of learner needs and established course outcomes is to use a variety of methods to collect information for creating an evaluative judgement.

The **learning activities** rely on the structure of the course and communicating how class time will be used, scaffolding the content, and selecting resources to ensure that students have the information that they require to perform well on assessments and demonstrate the course outcomes.

Designing Choice

Effective course design requires the consideration of outcomes, assessments, and learning activities. When the decision to include choice in assessment has been made, there are many options and considerations to make.
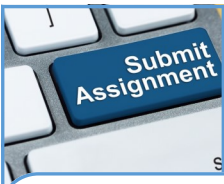

ASSESSMENT

Consider this

- How many assessments are needed?
- What topics are suited for assessment?
- Do assessments build on prior assessments?
- Can different styles of assessments suit the goal?
- How will the assessments be weighted?

Try this

- Use informal assessments to gauge ongoing learning
- Familiarize yourself with Blooms Taxonomy
- Use stand-alone assessments
- Be creative in design and allow students to be creative

SUBMISSION

Consider this

- What is the best medium for communicating learning?
- Are deadlines necessary?
- What elements of the assessment are to be handed in?
- Which platform, if any, are to be used for submission?

Try this

- Documents are great, but students may also be familiar with audio, video, and graphic design
- Be flexible with deadlines or provide 'slip days'
- Provide clear instructions on how to submit an assignment

PARTNERING

Consider this

- Can learning be enhanced through working with peers?
- Will you expect more from solo vs partner/ groups products?
- Are students prepared to handle in-group conflict?

Try this

- Give the option to students to work in groups or alone
- Learning includes navigating group dynamics. Have students show their contributions to the group work in a reflection
- Give strategies for handling group conflict

RESUBMISSION

Consider this

- Would resubmission after feedback strengthen learning?
- What would motivate a student to resubmit?
- Do resubmissions deserve 'extra' marks or demand full remark?

Try this

- Return feedback timely and offer chance to resubmit with any new knowledge gained
- Avoid penalizing students for resubmission efforts (e.g. resubmission grade is new grade)
- Have other TAs mark resubmissions to avoid bias

REFLECTION

Consider this

- Not all students find making choices easy
- Were there any unintended effects of having choice in assessment?
- Did providing choice benefit some students more than others?

Try this

- Provide opportunity for students to brainstorm ideas for choice options in groups or with TAs
- Collect anecdotal feedback from students asking questions on the experience they had
- Stay mindful of the way types of assessment benefits multiple identities and living situations

Checklist

Prior to course

- ☐ Decide on assessment elements
    - ☐ Number of assessments
    - ☐ Types of assessment
    - ☐ Submission
        - ☐ Deadlines
        - ☐ Software
    - ☐ Individual or partners / groups
- ☐ Prepare assignment descriptions/guides
- ☐ Prepare assessment rubrics
- ☐ Prepare materials for Teaching Assistants

During course orientation

- ☐ Describe course assessment strategy
- ☐ Describe assessment elements including each of the choices
- ☐ Describe submission requirements
- ☐ Note deadlines

During course delivery

- ☐ Check-in with students regarding assessment progress
- ☐ Remind students of deadlines, submission requirements
- ☐ Provide students with easy access to the assessments' requirements

After course completion

- ☐ Reflect on assessment elements

Notes

Resources

Books (click the image)
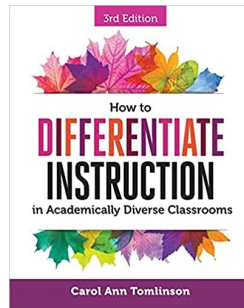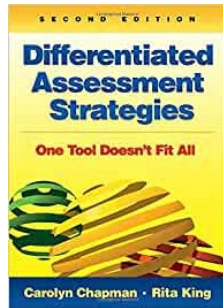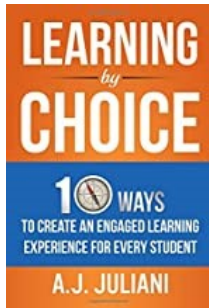
Professional Associations/ Networks

Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE)

Assessment in Higher Education (AHE)

Academic Literature

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Acknowledgement

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