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Seton Hall University
W. Paul Stillman School of Business
South Orange, New Jersey, United States

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W. Paul Stillman School of Business

Background

In 1997, the W. Paul Stillman School introduced a new undergraduate core curriculum, which included five competencies: change management, communications, critical thinking, teamwork, and technology. Working under the directive of the Faculty Assembly of the School of Business, an ad-hoc committee of five business faculty and four arts and sciences faculty developed measures for each competency—enumerating the skills that a student must demonstrate to be considered “competent.” Faculty also explained where in the undergraduate core curriculum that competency development would take place, proposed an assessment model for each competency, and made recommendations regarding implementation. The ad-hoc committee summarized its conclusions and recommendations in a report, Competencies Development in the Undergraduate Business Curriculum, which was approved by the business faculty. Participation in the assessment process was formalized as a degree requirement beginning with the fall 1998 entering class. The first sophomore assessment panels were held in the spring of 2000. Senior assessment panels were first held in November 2001.

Description

The four-phase assessment process begins with a first-year vocabulary test, which requires students to define key terms in four of the five competencies (critical thinking is excluded). Each year about half the sophomores are randomly selected to participate in assessment panels. Students excluded in their sophomore year must participate in an assessment panel at the beginning of their senior year. Finally, each student retakes the vocabulary test in the global business capstone course.

Students are assigned to groups of four to six and receive case materials two months prior to scheduled panel dates. At least one student from each group must attend preparatory workshops to learn about grading criteria, presentation guidelines, and panel procedures (see Timetable 2002-2003). Students work in teams to prepare responses to case questions and alone to write a short essay that requires the retrieval of financial information from Internet sources. Teams determine their own work allocations and how to deal with free riders.

Assessors, who usually are alumni or employees of companies that recruit Stillman graduates, are paid a $200 honorarium. Using a form that defines each competency and outlines general and case-specific assessment criteria, assessors submit a numerical score for the team on each competency (see Assessor’s Evaluation Form 2002). Assessors also comment on team and individual student performance with respect to each competency.
The Director of Assessment assigns a “pass” or “fail” to completed individual assignments. Students must repeat the assignment until they pass and will not be cleared for graduation until they have completed the whole assessment process. The best sophomore and senior teams are publicly recognized at the Stillman School’s annual Integrity and Professionalism Awards Luncheon. Students generally rate the whole process as a valuable learning experience.

Sophomore assessment case assignments focus on business law and economics concepts, which are covered early in the curriculum. Cases generally include an ethical issue or dilemma and an attempt is made to personalize the issue for the student. The individual assignment is to present a basic financial analysis using Excel.

Senior Assessment case assignments integrate all business disciplines, include significant numerical analysis, and incorporate one or more ethical issues. Recent cases have included questions about market/consumer analysis, executive compensation, and business strategy. The Excel assignment requires students to identify the most relevant financial measure for a particular application and interpret changes in the value of that measure.

The essay assignment requires students to select and support a position.

**Using the Data**

Average scores are tabulated and longitudinal results presented for each student classification (sophomore vs. senior). Scores cannot be directly compared across levels because questions and assignments differ significantly. The Director prepares a report of the findings for discussion by faculty at the School’s annual Teaching Workshop. Small stipends are sometimes offered to faculty for developing and implementing an additional assignment, requirement, or exercise to increase the academic challenge in a course.

The School seeks feedback for improvements to the assessment process. Assessor evaluation forms have been changed to give assessors more specific guidance in evaluating students’ mastery of the competencies. Suggested solutions to case questions now identify response elements that make an answer acceptable, good, very good, or excellent. The process also was improved recently by utilizing the assessment Web site to provide student teams with guidance and support.
Administration and Budget

The Director of Assessment, usually a full-time, tenure track faculty member, oversees the entire process with help from an administrative assistant. The Director of Assessment is responsible for:

- selecting/creating case materials and questions
- identifying, training and communicating with assessors
- holding information sessions and preparatory workshops for students
- developing materials for posting on the Web site
- grading individual assignments
- analyzing results and reporting to students, faculty, and assessors

The annual assessment budget totals $50,000. This budget includes the Director’s stipend, part of the administrative assistant’s salary, assessor honorariums, materials, gifts, and meals.

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