Teaching Tips/Notes NACTA Journal

Adopting Online Assessment in the Face-to-Face Classroom After COVID

The COVID pandemic brought the sudden introduction of remote online assessments to courses designed for traditional in-person formats. Instructors learned new techniques for developing and implementing online assessments and many became proficient in their offerings. Students quickly grew accustomed to completing assessments online. As I returned to the classroom teaching face-to-face (F2F), I retained my use of online assessments and combined them with in-person proctoring. Benefits of continuing this online assessment approach have been reduced paper usage, decreased exam management and grading effort, increased flexibility in adjusting scores after exams are graded, and additional information about student performance.

All students in the courses I teach F2F continue to take their exams online using their own computers in the classroom, during the scheduled lecture period. This practice can also be used for quizzes or any other assessment. An important yet unexpected advantage of this practice is that, when what is considered a correct answer and / or how points are allocated are reconsidered after students have completed the exam, the change across all students can be accomplished with a single edit to the exam online. This has been of considerable value. Previously, due to the large class size, students indicated their responses on scantron sheets, which were then scanned and graded by a machine specifically designed to do so in our Instructional Technologies Services (ITS). Subsequent changes in grading because of instructor error in noting the correct answer or student feedback required either rerunning the scantrons through ITS or manually adjusting grades for students whose grade was affected, the latter a very time-consuming process and the former simply inconvenient. Another important advantage has been that our learning management system supports running an item analysis on assessments. This provides useful input on the quality of questions, helps identify instructor grade coding errors, and identifies the level of student understanding of particular questions.

Potential challenges are that there may be an unexpected technology problem (e.g., Internet or learning management system is not available during the assessment period), or a student forgets their computer or needed charging cable or has a technology issue with their personal computer. System-wide technology issues are rare and generally identified in advance of a class period, which allows time for alternative accommodations such as postponing the assessment or running paper copies and reverting to the scantron. Students arriving without a charged computer or encountering technology issues during the assessment are thankfully rare. To plan for this possibility, I bring along my own computer, there is typically a computer serving as the authoring station in the classroom, and I have pre-identified the nearest computer cluster. To mitigate the potential effect of technology issues on a student's ability to complete their exam, I ensure settings in the learning management system allow for a student to exit and re-enter an exam without starting over.

The practice of online assessments proctored in the classroom offers consider efficiency and flexibility, and potential problems are rare and easily mitigated with planning. While there has been no formal query of students about the experience, over four course offerings and over 400 students, there has never been negative feedback on the practice. Enjoy your day!

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