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Grades as Assessment?

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Faculty members assign grades as a measure of individual student learning. In contrast, assessment looks at the learning of all students in a class or program. Grades can be used as the basis of assessment IF the activity which is graded is directly related to achievement of a specific outcome.

It may be helpful to illustrate this with an example. Assume students are assigned a paper on the role of the Federal Reserve Bank to address a course goal related to U.S. financial policy. If the paper's grade is only based on the correct interpretation and application of financial policy then the average grade of all students could be a meaningful assessment of student learning for this outcome. However, if the grade is based on a combination of grammar and punctuation, proper use of references, the assignment being turned in on-time, AND appropriate content related to financial policy then the grade is not just a direct measure of the goal and not a good basis for assessing the outcome. However, in this latter case it might still be possible to average just the content-subscore and use that for the assessment of student learning.

Faculty members are best qualified to define effective measures of student learning in their classes, this is why faculty bear the responsibility for assigning course grades. Assessment uses the information gained through grading (or other means) to look at the performance of the group in achieving the specific outcomes of the course or program. Look for ways to simplify assessment of student learning by capturing existing evaluation data (grades) from your courses and programs.

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'Supporting student learning and institutional effectiveness'
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