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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



## Six Types of Assessment Every Dean Needs to Use

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Persons new to the office of the Dean may soon discover the need to acquire a new set of skills to effectively carry out the job. Those skills range from supervision, pastoral care (yes, more than you imagined!), educational administrative planning, curriculum design and planning, political acumen, budgeting and financial management, and assessment. Of these, none seems to puzzle novice deans more than educational assessment. While it can seem daunting, as I sometimes tell deans asking for help in this practice, "It's not rocket science, but it helps if you know what you're doing."

There are six types of assessment practices, which, used together, will provide the dean a multifaceted and holistic view of student learning outcomes. These will provide deans, and Faculty, the data needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the curricula and to make wise and appropriate adjustments. Good data, rigorously derived, make for better decision-making than hunches, good-sounding ideas, predilections, or fads. As well, these assessments will provide the information needed to demonstrate rigorous academic practices to accrediting bodies.

### The Six Types of Assessments

#### DIAGNOSTIC



Diagnostic assessment measures a student's, or a class of students', strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and skills prior to an instructional set (a course), or prior to starting a program of study. Examples of diagnostic assessments used in theological schools include the TOEFL language proficiency exam given to international applicants, and the GRE. Some schools may administer writing assessments to evaluate the need for remedial work in preparation for academic writing in a degree program. Some DMin programs use the MAT as part of their admissions requirements. Some schools administered the MMPI personality inventory as part of their application process (which, upon taking, the seminary intake counselor suggested I should not go into ministry; advice I ignored and went on to have a successful ministry career. So there.).

### *FORMATIVE*

Formative assessment practices give evidence of a student's performance during instruction, during a learning experience, or in the midst of a course of study. Formative assessments are applied regularly at intervals throughout the instruction process. An example is a multi-faceted "mid-course" assessment with a faculty adviser to review academic performance and progress through a degree program course of study. This can include a student's self-assessment about their progress in formation goals. For students, formative assessments is an opportunity to receive feedback on academic performance and other goals.

### *SUMMATIVE*

Summative evaluations measure a student's achievement at the conclusion of an instructional set or course of study. The most obvious course level summative assessment are final exams and the final grade a student receives in a course. At the program level, summative assessments can include a grade distribution analysis, program retention and completion rates, graduating class profiles, and, a grade point analysis of graduating students (highest, lowest, median, average).

### *NORM-REFERENCED*

This assessment practice compares a student's performance against a national or other "norm" group. Some denominations require candidacy and ordination exams that demonstrate competencies in areas such as biblical exegesis, theology, polity, and worship and sacraments.

These denominations can provide comparative data to show your students' placement in norm-referenced evaluations and exams. Due to the loose and broad interpretation of accreditation standards, the wide variety of theological school cultures and contexts, and the range and amorphous nature of what constitutes effective ministry practice or pastoral competencies, norm-referenced assessments are a challenge in theological schools.

### *CRITERION-REFERENCED*

This assessment practice measures a student's performance against a published goal, specific objectives, or standards. In theological schools the most common criteria are interpretations of accreditation standards in program goals and the derivative student learning outcomes embedded in courses and program components. The application of well-designed assessment rubrics aid in the assessment of criterion-referenced evaluations.

### *BENCHMARK*

Benchmark evaluations are similar to some of the above. These practices are used to evaluate student performance at periodic intervals, or at the end of a grading period. They can be used to predict student performance on end-of-course summative tests, or, end-of-program competencies evaluations. Benchmark evaluations can also be used to predict student performance post-graduation. The use of alumni surveys evaluated with alignment with degree program goals can help in benchmark assessment. Again, the range ministry contexts in which alumni serve, and the amorphous nature of what constitutes ministry competencies, provide a challenge for theological schools to establish benchmarks. The increasing attention to competency-based programs will likely require schools to identify "benchmarks" as indicators of levels of competencies.

How many of these six assessments do you apply in your evaluation practices in your school? Which might you need to implement to provide a richer and more balanced assessment profile for your school?

How, for whom, and where will you publish the results of your assessments? For information? For accountability? For reporting?

<https://wabash.center/2018/04/six-types-of-assessment-every-dean-needs-to-use/>