Using Early Ungraded Assignments and Preassessments

By using early ungraded assignments or preassessments to assess students' prior knowledge, you are also activating previous mental models that can help students integrate new thinking (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). Beginning your course or new module with these practices can help you identify areas where students might need some extra support that you or a campus resource might provide (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). It can also help you and your students identify what they already know and are able to build on.

Preassessments When Starting the Course

When starting the course, create a preassessment on an introductory idea that students can quickly complete and that you can use to inform your teaching. Multiple-choice questions are an efficient way to help students understand the relationship between what they know and what you plan to teach. By providing information for both the correct and incorrect responses, you can also help students quickly identify and correct misconceptions.

The example below is a multiple-choice question from a political science course. The instructor has set up automated feedback for every possible response.

1. **What is democracy?**

   a) A system of government by and for the whole people

      - Feedback: Correct! A popular description of democracy in the U.S. is "of the people, by the people, for the people."

   b) A system of government in which one family rules and the position is inherited

      - Feedback: Incorrect. Democracy is a system in which government is made of the people it serves. Dynasties are ruled by a line of hereditary rulers.

   c) An indie movie released in 2019

      - Feedback: Incorrect. This should be a freebie! You know your movies! While "What is democracy?" is the title of a 2019 movie, the question is asking that you identify that democracy is a system of government by and for the whole people.

   d) A system in which there is no government and no one rules

      - Feedback: Incorrect. Anarchy is a society in which no one rules. Democracy is a system of government in which the people rule directly and through representatives.

Assignments to Assess Student Technical Readiness

Early assignments that have low-point values are good ways to help your students practice the technical skills they will need to use in the course. For example, if they will be using video or audio tools in the course, ask them to create a video or audio introduction and upload it to the course. Their success or challenge with this assignment will let you know if they will need additional technical support in using these tools. Additionally, if you want to be sure students consult assignment rubrics as they complete all assignments, offer points for using a rubric to self-assess their work for the initial few assignments. This will ensure they know where to access the rubric for future assignments.

Reference

Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R. M. (2021). *The online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips*. John Wiley & Sons.