Abstract

Education in America is in a state of change. The Obama administration has set a goal for the United States to reclaim the top position in the world for college completion by the year 2020. The Lumina Foundation has a similar goal of reaching 60% degree attainment by 2025. While college completion is important to secure America’s economic strength, credentials alone may not place graduates in jobs and careers.

A recent Association for American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) survey reports that employers indicate graduates lack the most important skills for career success, including communication, critical thinking, and diversity awareness (AAC&U, 2015). AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative believes that success and the ability to navigate more demanding environment in a responsible way will depend greatly on higher levels of learning and knowledge (AAC&U, 2015). The lack of preparation is magnified by the need for employees to take on additional responsibilities, apply a broader skillset, and be prepared to apply both intellectual and practical skills (AAC&U, 2015). Infusing these skills into college curricula is critical in order for students to thrive in our local communities and contribute nationally and globally (AAC&U, 2015).

The demand for more skilled and diverse graduates creates a huge opportunity for colleges and education as a whole. The time to act is now. There is a greater need than we have ever seen before. As educators, we are responsible for preparing students with the skills and knowledge to be successful in an ever-changing and demanding workforce. In addition, accurately measuring students’ attainment of these skills and providing rich feedback to continue the learning cycle is essential as students move through their degree programs.
As institutions of higher education, it is our responsibility to ensure that all graduates are entering the workforce equipped with the competencies intended in their degree program. Those competencies should align with the skills and tasks that students will perform in the workplace. Authentic assessments are powerful ways to provide students with real world scenarios, and opportunities to demonstrate their application of the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Feedback on those assessments helps students fill in any gaps within their own learning and better prepares them for application in the workplace.

As the adoption of Competency-Based Education (CBE) grows in the United States, more colleges and universities are turning to authentic assessment strategies to document mastery of skills and competencies within degree programs as well as to generate feedback for continual learning. While authentic assessment might be a powerful learning tool, it is not yet a widespread practice (CBEN, 2015). While being experts in their fields of study, faculty may not be equipped to create authentic tasks that are aligned with the skills employers are seeking. In addition, faculty may not have access to a network of colleagues, workforce and workplace demands, nor assessment experts that are willing to collaborate to create high quality assessments. Ensuring validity and reliability in authentic assessments is a more complex process than determining quality in an objective test. Faculty need access to high quality authentic assessment projects that measure the skills employers are seeking.

Assessment Design

At Rasmussen College, our work to identify industry skills for career success, which we call Transferable Skills, began in 2012. Through input from faculty, academic leadership and external stakeholders at the College, we identified six essential Transferable Skills that are applicable across any field of study, and paired them with associated competencies. The skills include

- communication,
- critical thinking,
• digital fluency,
• diversity and teamwork,
• ethics and professional responsibility, and
• information literacy.

As CBE at Rasmussen grows, we want to leverage our Transferable Skills work to develop authentic assessments, with broad industry application, for students to demonstrate their mastery of these skills. To create the assessments, we will facilitate a collaborative summit of subject matter, industry, curriculum, design, and faculty experts. The model for assessment creation is rooted in the collaboration between internal and external stakeholders at Rasmussen College. This ensures the assessment is directly tied to industry needs. Rubrics will also be developed for each assessments during the summit. Standard scoring rubrics allow for consistency in assessment delivery.

Once the assessments, and corresponding rubrics, have been created, we want to take the process a step further to ensure the assessments are continually relevant, valid and reliable, and draw on the expertise of our faculty. To do this, we will combine our authentic assessments with tagging technology to create a peer-reviewed assessment repository.

Peer-Reviewed Assessment Repository
The summit-designed assessments and corresponding rubrics, along with the associated competencies, will be funneled into the assessment repository. Once in the repository, each piece is appropriately tagged to the correct competency, making for easier identification, searching, use, and ongoing improvement.

Once properly tagged inside the repository, faculty have access to the assessments and corresponding rubrics for use within their online or residential courses. This is important because faculty are now able to focus more effort on learning and teaching in the classroom, and less on being an expert in assessment design and creation.

As faculty use the assessments, they are able to rate and provide feedback on student work using associated rubrics, which adds to the richness of the assessment data collection. We will conduct a peer-led process for norming and validation of each assessment, building on the Tuning approach to curriculum design (DQP, 2015). This peer-led norming process among faculty will strengthen the reliability and validity of the assessment. Student outcomes data and information from the norming process can be added and tagged alongside each assessment. In addition, continual industry review, through quarterly advisory board meetings, ensures the repository is continually relevant and always meeting the demands of the workforce. Each of these review components will inform improvements to the assessments. The repository technology will be able to identify variance in student work as faculty use assessment rubrics for scoring. Outliers would initiate additional quality adjustments to the assessment and training for faculty as needed.

**Outcomes**

A peer-reviewed assessment repository provides faculty with a wealth of well-designed, valid and reliable assessments for classroom application. It provides faculty choice and academic freedom in course delivery, while the assessment design approach ensures alignment to the Transferable Skills and industry needs.
To measure the impact of the peer-review assessment repository, we will ensure –

• faculty and industry experts in business, health sciences, design, technology, nursing, justice studies, and education are involved in the Transferable Skills Summit,

• authentic, project-based assessments are created for each Transferable Skill,

• students demonstrate mastery in each Transferable Skill throughout each program Rasmussen offers, and

• on-going quarterly evaluation of the assessment data.

We believe that the authentic assessments created through the Transferable Skills Summit, combined with the repository technology, will ensure faculty have the tools they need to help students meet workforce demands, set a standard for workforce preparedness, and position Rasmussen College as a leader in higher education.
References


