The Insight

To make informed course changes, consider going beyond assessing learning outcomes and assess whether students valued their learning.

Implications

When students value what they are learning, they are more likely to remember it.

"You can lead students to knowledge, but you can't make them think ... but you can inspire them to value what they are learning so they want to think!"

Did my students value their learning this semester?

As the end of the semester approaches, I find that I am often focused on assessing individual student learning of course outcomes, analyzing data I've collected throughout the semester on assignments, exams, projects, etc. When the course ends, I will further analyze this data, focusing on overall learning in the course to inform possible changes, but am I gathering enough information to make informed decisions about my teaching methods? Did the course meet the students' expectations for what they should be learning? Did it leave them wanting more? Did they want to learn or was their motivation to succeed based on extrinsic factors, like grades and program requirements?

I think about how I carefully plan assignments and activities that will challenge my students to go beyond remembering, understanding, and applying, to reach higher cognitive levels of analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), but have I been assessing how my students are progressing in the affective domain as it pertains to their learning? Considering the five major categories of the affective domain (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1973), I can establish if students are meeting the first two categories of both receiving and responding to phenomena because they must actively process and respond to information in order to successfully achieve the course learning outcomes, but are they reaching the third category of valuing what they are learning? Information must be meaningful to students for them to store it in their long-term memory (Smith & Ragan, 2005). I used various active learning and real-world problem solving assignments to try to make the content meaningful to students, but how do I know if my methods intrinsically motivated them to value what they were learning so that they will continue to remember it even after the final exam?

A suggestion I found in a blog on how to end your course (Panitz, 1999) was to have students write a letter to give advice to a friend who will take the same course the next semester. This can help you see what the students think is important for doing well in your course. Another suggestion for finding out about specific teaching methods or assignments is to ask: *What assignments or activities did you learn the most from this semester? What activities or assignments do you feel were least beneficial to your learning in this course?* It may be convenient to use a Likert scale for these types of questions if you have multiple methods and want to find out to what level students felt a specific type of activity aided in their learning in the course. [Note that the survey tool in Blackboard can be used with both Likert scale and open-ended questions, keeping individual student responses anonymous while still allowing the instructor to see who completed the survey.]

In addition to gathering information from students on their perceptions on the benefits of various assignments and learning activities, I plan on using course exit tickets with the following questions to help find out if students felt invested and valued their learning in a course: *What was the most valuable thing you learned in this course? What did you expect to learn in this course and do you feel you learned it? What do you wish you had learned in this course?* I am hoping to gain information that can inform future decisions on inspiring students to value their learning, even in courses they don't at first consider directly applicable to their major. It has often been said that "you can lead students to knowledge, but you can't make them think". I would add "but you can inspire them to value what they are learning so they want to think!"

References:

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Panitz, T. (1999). "How do you end your class or course? Sounds like a simple question...but read on for some fascinating insights into communications with students."Retrieved from http://home.capecod.net/~tpanitz/discussions/course-ending.htm

Smith, P.L., & Ragan, T.J. (2005). *Instructional design* (3rd Ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.