

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Assessment In Online Law School Classes

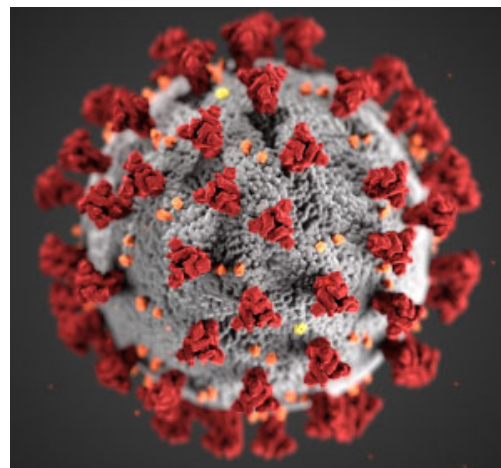
By Paul Caron

Emily Grant (Professor of Law & Co-Director, Institute for Law Teaching and Learning, Washburn), *Assessment in Online Classes*:

As assessment committee chair (and just a fan of the assessment Kool-Aid generally), I wanted to reach out (and was invited to do by colleagues) with some suggestions for assessment in the online version of your classes.

First, in terms of summative (end of the semester) assessment, I imagine that's going to be a faculty-wide conversation. I do offer this link to Larry Cunningham's blog, raising some questions to ponder as we decide how to move forward with finals.

Next, in terms of formative assessment, I've got some ideas (with apologies in advance for how long this is!). And I'm sure others may have as well — please chime in!



Polling questions or multiple choice quizzes both work well here. Low stakes, no grading required on your end, students can see the answer / explanation after they participate.

I sometimes provide guided reading questions for the students — things I want them to be able to answer after having completed the assigned reading. I don't provide answers, but definitely you could use those prompts for conversation in your zoom class sessions. At the very least, you can direct the students to parts of the reading that you find most significant. (For me, I use the kinds of questions I would ask in a Socratic discussion – What's the majority approach? Why did this court adopt the minority approach? Do you think that's what the testator would have wanted?)

Discussion boards can serve a formative assessment function, though I've found students aren't huge fans of boards that frequently have requirements like "post once by Thursday and respond to two other people by Saturday." Often, they see this as busy work that they don't get anything out of. But I do think you can carefully craft a question you want them to think about — the kind of question with no "right" answer that you might ask in class to generate discussion — and at least get them to engage with the material (if not each other). I haven't had much luck yet getting students to actually have a conversation with each other via discussion boards, but I have asked some questions that required them to think and offer an opinion. Also consider whether you need to respond / summarize / wrap up the discussion at the end of the week or the start of the next week, just to provide any "answers" or guidance you want them to have on the question you asked.

To replicate in-class activities where I might have students work on a problem and then we would discuss it as a large group, you can have the students work on the problem by themselves, submit their work to whatever LMS you're using (TWEN or D2L), and then release the answer only after they've submitted so they can self-assess. Or walk through the answer during your zoom classes. That relieves you of the grading burden and still provides students some guidance as to their understanding of the material.

Also consider having students answer some question or problem and then providing them with a grading rubric (and maybe sample answer) so that they can review their own work. Or you could have them peer grade and review someone else's work using your rubric.

If you're doing a flipped classroom set-up, where you post videos in advance of class, you might consider using PlayPosIt, which allows you to stop a video and ask the students a question for which they have to type in an answer before the video resumes. I use this for some of my DET videos. Downside: unless you have the students

sign up for PlayPosIt (which seems like a hassle), it doesn't actually record their responses, so you can't track their understanding. BUT I do like that it makes them at least think about what I've asked and try to answer before continuing on to hear my explanation.

As I think I've mentioned in previous emails, I have beta-tested a couple of online modules in DET this semester already. After each, I asked my students for feedback and I tried to explain my use of various online tools (guided reading questions, PlayPosIt videos, etc.). And one student, who I actually really trust, said something like "you don't assess those things in the classroom every week. I could be completely out of it and you wouldn't really know." Which is true. So on some level we have to trust our students and their work ethic.

Which brings me to (yet another) soapbox — online learning, even synchronous online learning, is a lot harder for certain students. They're going to need to be self-motivated in a different way than for in-person classes. And it might not be a bad idea to tell them that now: "I'm sorry for the extra burden on you, but I definitely need you to stay on top of things; don't fade away. If I notice you absent or not completing online assessments, I'm going to reach out so I don't lose you these last six weeks."
