Quiz Provides Early Student Learning Insights

By Don Sutherland

Last Monday, I administered a short quiz to my BBA 407 Strategic Management students. The purpose of the quiz was far more about gaining early insight into student learning than allowing students to accumulate points toward their final grade. As a result, the quiz was worth just 5% of a student's grade. Moreover, all who took the quiz received the full five points. All who did not take the quiz, received none.

The quiz was comprised of five multiple choice questions. Two questions were those that had reliably indicated student difficulty. In general, students who missed both those questions on past mid-term exams scored significantly below the class average on the mid-term exam and were often at risk of receiving a low grade. The last question required students to read a passage from a 10-K report, analyze the information from that passage, and then reach a conclusion about the dynamics of the industry in which the company operated.

The quiz identified six students who are at possible risk of difficulty in the course. Each of those students was e-mailed and instructed to set up a mandatory appointment to discuss a turnaround approach to improve his or her performance. The departmental academic adviser was also provided with the names of the students and relevant information should additional intervention be required.

To further understand the differences in performance, data concerning student work was pulled. Data for "at risk" group was compared to data from all other students. The "at risk" group had submitted substantially lower share of assignments than their counterparts who were not identified as being at risk of academic difficulty. In fact, the "at risk" group submitted fewer than half of their assignments. In contrast, the other students submitted almost three-quarters of their assignments.

At-Risk Students vs. All Other Students:

Category	% of Completed Chapter Assignments (100% = all students completed all Assignments)	% who Submitted Term Paper Outlines	% who Attended the Mandatory Library Session (Information Literacy)
At-Risk	47%	67%	83%
All Others	74%	96%	100%

Considering this information, part of the turnaround approach will involve requiring the "at risk" students to complete and submit all prior assignments that they had missed. While such late work won't provide credit for the missed assignments, it will increase their exposure to course content. At the same time, additional materials and work will be provided. Their performance will be subject to increased monitoring.

The final question required students to begin to apply course concepts based on real information. Students have consistently done well in identifying, describing, and defining concepts. They

have had less success in applying concepts, especially when conflicting or ambiguous information was present or there was a degree of uncertainty. Yet, it is those characteristics that define the real world in which students will proceed upon graduation.

Perhaps not too surprisingly, student performance on that question was far worse than students' performance on the quiz as a whole. In fact, just one-in-four students identified the correct industry characteristic. Case study assignments and additional exposure to company and industry material typically lead to much improved performance at the end of the semester.

In earlier semesters, students were first asked to make such an analysis on the Mid-Term exam. Afterward, the results were discussed and analyzed in class. Incorporating a similar task on the earlier quiz was aimed at accelerating the learning and experience process in applying course concepts. End-of-semester data will determine whether or not that effort improved student learning. If there was a positive outcome that approach will be replicated in future semesters.