

# Diagnostic Exam Snapshot

By Don Sutherland

At the beginning of each semester, I give my students a diagnostic exam. The exam allows me to assess student knowledge at the beginning of each semester. Afterward, I can use the pre-test/post-test approach to help determine how much my students learned during the semester.

In addition to content questions, the diagnostic exam contains survey questions. Those questions are aimed at gaining further insight into the incoming class so as to provide opportunities for early responses aimed at heading off challenges that could impede student learning.

Typically, there is a question concerning student confidence. Students who express a high degree of confidence have typically modestly outperformed all other students during the course of the semester.

For the first time, the diagnostic exam incorporated some of the questions from Angela Lee Duckworth's "[Grit Scale](#)."

I then compared the results for students who started at Lehman College as freshmen out of high school and those who transferred to Lehman College from a community college or another four-year school, as my class was comprised of a near equal mix of the two groups. When it came to confidence and overall grit, both groups of students had almost identical scores. However, when it came to resilience, transfer students rated themselves somewhat lower than the students who entered as freshmen. This difference in students' self-assessment may suggest a need for customizing approaches for dealing with challenges that may arise during the course of the semester.