

TECNIA INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

NAAC Accredited Grade 'A' Institute

Internal Quality Assessment Cell
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-: Assessing Abilities & Professional Skills:-

In the 21st century, professional skills (also known as soft skills, generic skills or transferable skills) have emerged as important attributes of a graduate engineer. Studies show that Industry/ employers around the world value these abilities more than the disciplinary knowledge. This is also reflected in the NBA graduate attributes wherein six out of twelve attributes belong to this category, viz. (1) communication, (2) teamwork, (3) understanding ethics and professionalism, (4) understanding global and societal contexts, (5) lifelong learning, and (6) knowledge of contemporary issues. Further, higher-order cognitive abilities like critical thinking, problem-solving and making informed decisions are also crucial for a graduate to succeed in the emerging world. Though the employers consider these professional skills and higher abilities as important, students are weak in them. The main challenge surrounding them is that they are difficult to assess through existing conventional examination system.

1. Innovative Educational Experiences to Teach and Assess

One of the main obstacles in addressing these outcomes is the limitation of educational experience we create within our ICT programs. Most of the coursework in our programs are oriented towards teaching technical knowledge and skills; hence, the assessment is limited to those abilities. However, acquiring the professional outcomes may not result simply from participation in a particular class or set of classes. Rather, these outcomes are more often acquired or influenced through sources both in and outside the classroom [4].

To address these challenges, comprehensive reforms are needed in the way we design our curriculum, student learning experiences and assessment of the outcomes. Worldwide several attempts are being made to address these challenges. Following are the few educational experiences that are recommended to teach and assess professional outcomes and higher-order cognitive abilities:

- Course projects
- Open-ended experiments in laboratories
- Project-based learning modules
- MOOCs
- Co-Curricular experiences
- Mini / Minor projects
- Final year projects
- Internship experiences
- E-portfolios of student works

2. Using Scoring Rubrics as Assessment Tool

To evaluate the above, student works for attainment of course outcomes and hence POs, it is of utmost importance to have reliable methods / proper assessment tools. Rubrics provide a powerful tool for assessment and grading of student work. They can also serve as a transparent and inspiring guide to learning. Rubrics are scoring, or grading tool used to measure a students' performance and learning across a set of criteria and objectives. Rubrics communicate to students (and to other markers) your expectations in the assessment, and what you consider important.

There are three components within rubrics namely (i) criteria / performance Indicator: the aspects of performance that will be assessed, (ii) descriptors: characteristics that are associated with each dimension, and (iii) scale/level of performance: a rating scale that defines students' level of mastery within each criterion.

Communication Skills				
	Unsatisfactory 1	Developing 2	Satisfactory 3	Exemplary 4
Performance criteria				
Performance criteria				
Performance criteria				
Performance criteria				

Fig. 4: Examples of Rubrics (Accessed from Rogers 2010)

3. Open-Book Examinations

In the earlier sections it was noted that the traditional written examinations have a significant weakness that they tend to encourage rote learning and more superficial application of knowledge. This deficiency can be overcome by “open-book examination”. Open-book examination is similar to time constrained written examinations but designed in a way that allows students to refer to either class notes, textbooks, or other approved material while answering questions. They are particularly useful if you want to test skills in application, analysis and evaluation, i.e. higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy. However, in a program, the courses or the curriculum areas that are best suited to an open-book exam are to be carefully chosen.

Advantages of open-book examinations

1. Less demanding on memory and hence less stressful
2. Questions can emphasise more on problem-solving, application of knowledge and higher-order thinking rather than simple recall of facts.
3. Assessment questions can reflect real-life situations that require comprehension, information retrieval and synthesising skills of the students to solve.

Designing a good open-book examination

- Set questions that require students to do things with the information available to them, rather than to merely locate the correct information and then summarize or rewrite it.
- The questions in open-book exam must take advantage of the format, and give more weightage to the application of knowledge, critical thinking and use of resources for solving real complex ICT problems.
- As the nature of questions is complex, it is to be ensured that the students get enough time. Open book test questions typically take longer time compared to traditional examinations. It is advisable either to set less number of questions that encompass 2 or 3 concepts taught or allocate longer duration of time for the examinations.

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