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European Views on Assessment

No matter how culturally diverse their student bodies may be, most U.S. business schools can apply their assessment plans under two assumptions—primarily, that their language of choice is English and that their programs operate in a largely American context. That's not necessarily the case for schools in Europe, where assessment is complicated by the vast cultural, social, and behavioral dissimilarities among students and faculty.

For instance, multiple-choice questionnaires are common in the U.S., but they are not the norm for many students from outside the U.S. system, says Sandrine Ricard, vice president at the Monaco Business School at the International University of Monaco. "We have used the Educational Testing Service's Major Field Test in Business for years. But given the cultural diversity of our student body, the test can't measure the whole set of learning outcomes for our students," she says.

For that reason, IUM faculty rely on a variety of social and behavioral approaches to assessment. Ricard emphasizes that the final measure of student learning comes down to how graduates perform in the workplace. Through companies' updates on students' on-the-job performance, IUM faculty assess how well graduates have translated their educations to their careers.

Erasmus University's Rotterdam School of Management in The Netherlands also takes cultural diversity into account in its assessment activities. RSM's MBA program serves more than 120 students from 50 different countries, which makes multiple and diverse avenues to assessment a must, says Diane Bevelander, associate dean of MBA programs.

In addition to traditional testing, RSM faculty rely on the following multifaceted strategies that are integrated throughout the MBA program:

Self-assessment. At the start of the MBA program, students complete an assignment that their professor grades and returns. Afterward, they are asked whether they think the professor's evaluation is fair. At semester's end, they are asked to re-evaluate their work on the same assignment.

"At first, students will say, 'Why did the professor give me a seven out of ten? I should have gotten a nine,'" says Bevelander. "When they return to that assignment at the end of the program, they realize how much they have learned."

Evaluation of feedback. RSM students regularly give feedback to their peers, but throughout the program, students are critiqued on how helpful their feedback is and how much its quality improves over time, as a measure of their knowledge and communication skills.

Evaluation of problem-solving skills. RSM has been experimenting with "critical incident logs," where students write about their responses to problems they have faced. "We compare their first logs to their last," says Bevelander. "At first, we find that students often view the solution to a problem as someone else's responsibility. In their last, we evaluate how well they've learned to think of multiple solutions and under-

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stand why others might think differently than they do."

Evaluation of personal networks. Several times a year, the school creates a computerized map of students' personal and professional networks. The map will show, for example, whether a Japanese student interacts only with other Japanese students. Once the student is aware of the gaps in his network, he can work to diversify it.

Faculty and course evaluations. On faculty evaluations, students are also asked to rate their own performance in their courses, including whether they completed all readings and assignments and how much they studied.

Personal essays and presentations. After RSM's MBA students complete major projects, such as case studies or international travel, they must write essays, develop videos, or create PowerPoint presentations to demonstrate the knowledge they obtained or their understanding of a core issue.

Customization. RSM also makes assessment student-specific. For example, MBA students from countries where speaking out in class is discouraged must strengthen their class participation skills; they are evaluated at program's end on how well they've learned to add value to class discussion. Students are evaluated on other skills such as self-management, teamwork, critical thinking, and theoretical application, depending on their personal strengths and weaknesses.

Simulations. This year, as part of a sustainability course, RSM required students to take part in a three-hour simulation in which a company faces an environmental problem. During the game, many students made short-term decisions that caused irreparable harm to the simulated environment. "Many were horrified at what they had done and wondered why they didn't think about long-term consequences," says Bevelander. The school plans to have students play the same game again next semester to measure how far their decision making has evolved.

Internet feedback. The school may soon have its professors provide feedback on student essays via Internet-based audio files. Three faculty members already are recording and uploading verbal feedback to students on Blackboard, and the school hopes other faculty will do the same, says Bevelander. Verbal responses take less time than written responses, and students can listen to faculty speak as they go through a paper point by point. "Students appreciate the more personalized approach," Bevelander adds.

Integrating these assessment activities into the program would be more difficult if not for the relatively small size of the school's student body, Bevelander admits. But when these tools are integrated into courses, they do more than account for cultural differences, she says. They also supply faculty with information about students' functional knowledge, critical thinking, communication skills, and behavioral responses that no multiple-choice test can provide. That information, she adds, can help professors make their teaching more effective—and make their jobs easier in the long run.