

Student Success

STEP BY STEP

By Lara Skaggs

The National Health Science Assessment measures student mastery of basic skills and knowledge that workers in all aspects of the health industry need to know. The assessment also satisfies the technical skills assessment requirement in state and federal legislation, so it's a natural fit for entry-level health care workers, especially those whose training does not require a specific assessment for certification or licensure.

The educational climate today is one of assessment equaling student success. Therefore, it's important for you, as a health science instructor, to review the standards yearly in order to guarantee the best possible outcome for every student.

The National Consortium for Health Science Education (NCHSE) recommends the following steps in moving toward fantastic student results.

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Step One

Identify and Crosswalk National, State and Local Standards

With any assessment, the first action should always be to determine what standards will be covered. In the world of health science education, most professions require a credential from a state or national organization. Each of these organizations has developed its own assessment with that end in mind.

Specific information for the National Health Science Assessment can be found at www.healthscienceconsortium.org under the heading “Health Science Assessment.” In addition to the National Healthcare Foundation Standards and Accountability Criteria, which provide the crucial content to be covered by teachers, there are also teacher resources for classroom delivery of the standards, portfolio development and grading.

As you examine potential assessments for use by your students, ask yourself:

- What skills must students possess and demonstrate to be successful practitioners?
- Is licensure, certification or registration required in my state? If so, who is the state or national credentialing agency or organization?
- Which assessments are considered mandatory for credentialing and which are nice to have?
- If the standards aren’t listed, do I have access to the test “blueprint” or “plan?”
- Where is all this information found?

In the case of the National Health Science Assessment, all information can be found by linking to NCHSE’s website (www.healthscienceconsortium.org); but sometimes it can be a journey through the Internet to find all you need to answer your questions.

Step Two

Review National, State and Local Assessment Data

Each year, NCHSE’s Executive Committee reviews the national assessment data with the help of its vendor. This data not only shows the number of assessments given, but also participating states, types of courses students taking the assessment are completing and an item analysis that determines which items need to be changed or removed from the test. One of the most important aspects of the review team—whether revising or updating the standards or assessment items—is that this team includes professionals from many health care disciplines, not just nursing. State aggregate data and individual school/instructor data are also available and are important parts of the review process.

Of particular interest to the classroom teacher is the aggregate student data. Are there any standards with low pass rates that need more attention in the classroom instruction? In the National Health Science Assessment, the Health Maintenance Practices standard has received low pass rates over the past five years. Why do you think this is true? As the instructor, can you recall when this was a priority topic?

Is there a way to integrate these concepts into other material? For example, when you cover the cardiac system, work in concepts of heart health like diet and exercise.

Step Three

Review Instructional Materials/ Resources Available

Numerous resources are available to instructors and students today, and they take many forms other than the traditional textbook. What additional instructional materials do you use in your classroom? Do you integrate videos (whether on DVD or YouTube) or PowerPoint slides that go along with the text? Can students use interactive games in the classroom? Do they have Internet and computer access for research and word processing? In this new world of the blended classroom, consider the many ways to bring the world of online instruction to the traditional classroom. Requiring students to prepare before your class will enable you to ask questions and engage students in activities that bring content to life.

Once you determine all that is available, compare it to the standards and accountability criteria (objectives, test blueprint, etc.) Do they align with the standards set forth by the assessment? How do you know? If all the content isn’t covered, where are the gaps? Are there other resources available that might “fill” this instructional need? Consider creating a table with the foundation standards and accountability criteria (or the curriculum standards for the education program) on the left side of the table, listing the criteria/objectives in separate rows. On the right side of the table, you should verify points in the long-range plan where the content is included. Write the course, lesson, objective(s) and resource(s) used to confirm that the content is a part of current student expectations.

If there is content that is not covered, now is the time to add materials to cover the standards effectively. Fill the gaps with engaging, student-centered activities

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and assessment is one tool employed to gather data on our success.

that will not only deliver the information, but will also teach students how to learn the content!

Step Four

Prepare Students for Assessment

Admittedly, instructors want to know what is on the test. Who can blame them? But it can be a very slippery slope. In education today, student scores are often used to determine instructor effectiveness.

“Teaching to the test” is not the goal of any assessment and can backfire by students learning something only long

enough to pass the test. Students’ growth can be measured by their ability to put concepts into long-term memory and by their ability to use critical thinking skills to apply that knowledge in any setting.

Reviewing for an assessment is not about having the actual test items and repeating them over and over, but rather making sure that students utilize the information they have studied, not just memorizing it for the test. A common concern among instructors is that students do not take assessments seriously. The challenge is to teach without them knowing it! Ask yourself:

- When is the assessment administered? Immediately upon completion of concepts, or is it months later? Do all instructors understand what will be assessed and therefore place importance on that topic?
- Do all students receive a content review *before* the assessment?
- Are the assessment results counted into the grading formula for the final grade?
- Does the assessment vendor provide any sample questions that help prepare students for the way the exam will be formatted? Are there suggested resources from the vendor offered as a preparation guide?

As an instructor, consider these questions and allow the answers to guide student preparation.

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Step Five

Review Student Success

Reviewing student success seems intuitive, as most instructors are required to turn in grades, share positive outcomes with administration and plan for the coming year. However, sometimes we fall short. Remember that you can learn as much by identifying perceived failures as by definitive successes. Consider this information and take the time to review each student's individual assessment results, as well as the results of the class as a whole. Are there certain content areas that showed a high level of student success? What topics were challenging? Remember to guide future instruction based on this information. Perhaps the time spent covering one area can be reduced and another expanded.

Once the school year or program is complete, do you share assessment results with your advisory committee and administration? An advisory committee should be used to make the classroom better in every way ... and don't just share the good stuff! Maybe your advisory committee has ideas to add to student success. Most local school districts maintain data for continuous school improvement. Administration can be a valuable resource to help determine areas for student progress, as well. If your district does participate in a continuous school improvement model, what data is collected and how can you make a difference with your teaching?

The most important feedback you can receive is from employers. If they consistently request additional employability skills, find out specific areas for improvement, and implement a curriculum to address their needs. Our health care partners are depending on us to send them a well-trained workforce, one that's ready for the lightning-quick changes in the workplace.

Student growth is our mission—and assessment is one tool employed to gather data on our success. The more you know about curriculum standards, resources, outcomes and remediation, the more successful each of your students will be. **■**

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