ADMINISTRATION

[no material in this edition]

ADMISSION TO PRACTICE

[no material in this edition]

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Alternative assessment procedures: recent trends and experiences from practice
M Valcke, F Dochy, E Maassen & B De Crane
29 Law Teacher 3, 1995, pp 323-334

In current educational practice, a wide variety of alternative assessment procedures has been adopted. The context and setting of teaching and learning law indicate the major trends affecting the nature, content and organisational features of assessment approaches and techniques. In particular, the growing concern to elaborate skills-based curricula in response to calls for a more competency-based orientation and the increasing practice of integrating assessment into the overall instructional process, rather than merely positioning it at the end of the learning/ teaching period, require different assessment techniques.

The importance of entry assessment has increased due to the tendency toward cost reduction and more severe entry criteria in the name of economic efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, new psychological insights into learning have redefined the role and function of assessment so that it takes a central position in the instructional setting.

This implies that the teaching/ learning process starts with determining the prior knowledge of a student, in order to adapt the ensuing teaching/ learning process to the specific needs of the student. The traditional culture of testing has recently shifted toward an era of assessment, in which assessment is a tool for supporting students at the start, during and after learning.

The prior knowledge state tests (PKST) establish which students have the background knowledge to do the course and whether students require additional prior instruction. It also allows students to be split into fast track groups, permitting them to utilise their existing knowledge rather than sitting through preliminary material with which they are already familiar. There are several types of PKST, including optimal requisite, subject oriented and domain-specific.

The parties involved in the assessment process are the institution and the students. Traditionally, it was the institution only with its responsibilities for certifying the mastery level of students but there is now a shift in attention to the responsibilities of the individual student. Self and peer assessment or co-assessment are new practices. Students become responsible for their own learning and can independently assess their mastery of the objectives. However, many have been reluctant to put self assessment into practice due to doubt about the acceptability of test results for certification purposes.

There is a growing demand for skills assessment techniques as more law schools use simulations and live client work to develop skills. Assessment centres have been established which measure the prior knowledge acquired

elsewhere. Performance is being assessed through the use of multiple choice answers, short answer questions, open questions, problem solving, simulations and portfolios.

Three examples of innovative assessment approaches are given: an electronic moot court; Roman Law with Hypercard; and prior knowledge state tests and the composition of tailor-made courses as used in an open learning university. These developments clearly illustrate the paradigm shift from an institutionally defined focus on final testing toward a movement in which students are actively involved in testing their own mastery of the objectives.

The impact of modularisation and semesterisation on the assessment of undergraduate law students
P Harris & D Tribe
29 Law Teacher 3, 1995, pp 279-294

The modular or unitised pattern of study has been gradually introduced over the last 20 years in UK universities. Modularisation allows a subject to be taken at different institutions and the transfer of credit from one institution to another. The rationale underlying the process of modularisation is that it breaks the traditional boundaries of learning by allowing students of all ages and non-traditional backgrounds to take advantage of the opportunity to study in higher education. It also gives some degree of geographical freedom and flexibility and creates new student markets at a time of declining resources for the higher education sector.

Modularisation is usually accompanied by semesterisation,