



Demystifying Outcomes Assessment for International Educators: A Practical Approach

Deardorff, Darla K.
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Book Review

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Few words strike fear in the hearts of post-secondary teachers more than “assessment.” Most faculty in undergraduate and graduate-level education are better-versed in their own specializations than they are in the more administrative aspects of their schools. Assessment often feels like one of those top-down assignments that faculty must add to their workload in order to get ready for the next accreditation visit.

Darla K. Deardorff provides relief from this fear by removing the mystery from the process of assessment. She places it within the healthy context of enabling teachers to see if their work is actually accomplishing what they intend for it to accomplish, and, on a broader scale, if the overall mission of the institution is being achieved. Deardorff takes time to define all of the technical terms so that even those who feel like novices in this domain understand the issues, making it an easy read. The second half of the book is comprised entirely of appendices, full of succinct guidelines on how to create and implement an assessment plan along with examples of tools and processes used at various schools.

The book begins in an engaging manner by using several myths regarding assessment as a foil to make a case for the importance of doing assessment well. The second chapter then looks at thirty frequently asked questions about assessment. Once the reader finishes the first two chapters, he or she is prepared to find out more about the distinctive aspects of international education and learn what goes into creating an effective assessment program – from start, through implementation, and finally to evaluation and revision.

Most of this book would serve as a practical guide for anyone involved in educational

assessment, but Deardorff relates the book most specifically to those engaged in international education, by which she means “efforts that address the integration of international, intercultural, or global dimensions into education” (29). This includes schools with study abroad programs, those with a strong international student or faculty presence on campus, or even those that are actively engaged in preparing students to work in other cultures or simply be better global citizens. This adds a level of complexity to the assessment process that traditional models of assessment have not addressed.

While many books on assessment are geared more toward institutional assessment in comparison with other institutions or benchmarks, Deardorff is focused on student learning outcomes and how one knows whether or not they are being achieved. Special attention is given to whether or not methods of measuring these outcomes are both valid and accurate. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to this kind of assessment, but the processes outlined in the book should help any institution create an assessment plan that is both feasible and useful. While it is vital that faculty be heavily involved in this process, a good assessment plan will involve multiple stakeholders, will be integrated into the ongoing program of the school, will make use of both indirect and direct methods of feedback, and will make use of well-planned rubrics.

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