Conducting Effective Assessments in Online Learning

1. Align assessments with learning objectives. Begin by deciding what your students should be able to do at the completion of the instruction. Write learning objectives in measurable, observable terms and use them to inform the design of your assessments.

2. Administer one or two assessments early in the semester that you know your students can master to give them confidence in the online environment and confirm their participation in the course. For example, administer a short quiz to ensure that they have completed an early reading assignment or, in a course that requires accessing online library resources, ask them to retrieve a journal article and submit it as an assignment.

3. Use a variety of methods to offer students multiple ways of demonstrating their mastery and to provide you with multiple perspectives on their performance.

4. Administer assessments frequently to keep students engaged in the learning process and provide opportunities for them to reflect on their developing mastery.

5. Communicate instructions clearly and completely. For timed tests, this means providing unambiguous, thorough directions for completing the test. For open-ended, written assessments, provide examples of prior good student work and use a rubric to specify target performance.

6. Use a question and answer discussion board to address student questions about assessments before due dates occur.

7. Offer constructive and timely feedback that makes clear to students what the target performance is, how their performance relates to the target, and what they can do to close the gap. Try to achieve a one-week turnaround time for all assignments.

8. Look for appropriate ways to divest some of the feedback responsibility. For example, online quizzes that provide automated scoring and correct answers can be used to test students on reading material. Peer feedback is another way to offload some of the burden while also providing students with additional opportunities for engaging with the learning material.

9. To reduce the opportunity of cheating in traditional assessments, use proctored, off-site exams. Pitt Online students in southwestern Pennsylvania can arrange to take an exam at one of several Pitt-affiliated proctored test sites. Students outside the area may apply to the CIDDE Testing Center to request authorization for finding a proctoring site on their own (often a library or educational institution). Proctored testing is most appropriate for infrequent, high-stakes assessments. For a list of Pitt-affiliated proctoring sites and information about arranging for a non-Pitt proctor, visit the University of Pittsburgh Testing Center at http://www.uptc.pitt.edu/home/.

10. To encourage academic integrity in written work, use cumulative assignments that build on one another. You may also ask students to make connections to their own professional experiences or to current, timely news events.