USING PERFORMANCE TASKS TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND CRITICAL THINKING

*Imagine you are a sophomore psychology major at Bellarmine, and have your first class session of Psy 208: Personality: Theories and Research. The instructor is reviewing the course syllabus and its requirements and comes to the section on "course assessments." She explains that you will be engaged in a number of PERFORMANCE TASKS over the course of the semester, for which there will be a variety of assessments to determine your final grade. Hmmm…you are wondering just what are these "**Performance Tasks**?"*

> A range of curricular and pedagogical approaches that enable students to experience course content have emerged since [John] Dewey. Variously dubbed "inquiry-based learning" and "problem-based learning," such approaches have been framed as alternatives to traditional pedagogical strategies such as the lecture…Assessment tasks that align with these active learning strategies (called "authentic" assessments) present students with a complex, real-world challenge in which the scenario, role, process, and product are all authentic; they must then demonstrate that they have the skills and knowledge to complete the task. Thus students actively participate in the problem-solving exercise rather than passively selecting answers—which runs counter to the assumption that if students do well on a multiple-choice test that focuses solely on content, they will know how to use the information in a real-world context.

This definition of "performance tasks" is from "Taking Teaching to (Performance) Task: Linking Pedagogical and Assessment Practices," by Marc Chun, which appeared in the March/April 2010 edition of *Change* magazine (click on link below). (http://www.collegiatelearningassessment.org/files/TakingTeachingToTask2.pdf) The article is an excellent introduction to using **performance tasks** as a way to:

- Increase student engagement
- Mesh course and assignment objectives with actual assessments
- Increase students' ability to analyze information, evaluate sources and evidence, and think critically and creatively
- Strengthen students' ability to collaborate effectively

In 2010, Bellarmine joined the CIC/CLA Consortium (Council of Independent Colleges and Collegiate Learning Assessment) to being assessing critical thinking and problem-solving skills in a population of freshmen and seniors – as assessed on the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). We can then measure the growth of our own students on these skills as well as compare our students' growth to other students nationally. The CLA uses a performance task format, which can provide a model for our use of performance tasks in courses.

Creating performance tasks for your courses takes time, especially in terms of preparation of types of evidence that students will consider in working to find solutions to the problems posed. Depending on the skills an instructor wants to assess, students can be asked to evaluate a number of different types of evidence from a personal letter of endorsement to a scientific research study. The preparation will be worth it in terms of the outcomes listed above! Start slowly, experiment-ting with a task that may take 2-3 class sessions, then solicit feedback from students as to their learning, enjoyment of this approach, and engagement.

A number of resources follow to assist you in designing performance tasks for your classroom:

1) Power Point Presentations: Introduction to Performance Tasks Part I; Introduction to Performance Tasks Part II
2) Performance Task Tools and Samples:
    - The Backward Design Process
    - Steps in Creating a Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) type of performance task
    - Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument types of tasks
    - Qualifications of a Good Performance Task – Reality Check
    - A sample Performance Task Scenario
    - Ideas for Performance Tasks

Additional Resources:
    - www.collegiatelearningassessment.org
    - http://collegiatelearningassessment.org/files/Architecture_of_the_CLA_Tasks.pdf
    - www.claintheclassroom.org

Additional Questions?

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