

Bicentennial, Interrupted: IUPUI's Pandemic Year 1

Thomas W. Hahn, Susan Kahn, and Caleb J. Keith

IN 2019–20, INDIANA UNIVERSITY—all nine campuses, including Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)—commemorated the bicentennial of its founding in 1820 and the many accomplishments of the past two centuries with a series of events throughout the academic year. No one expected these celebrations to be interrupted by a deadly global pandemic. But on March 6, state health officials announced Indiana's first confirmed case of COVID-19, and Governor Eric Holcomb declared a public health emergency. On March 10, with six confirmed cases across the state, IU President Michael McRobbie announced that, in order to protect the health and safety of the university community, face-to-face instruction would be suspended for two weeks following spring break, with all classes transitioning to emergency remote learning. Subsequently, as the pandemic surged across the state, the nation, and the world, this suspension was extended to the remainder of the spring semester and through the summer. All university employees able to perform their job functions remotely were instructed to do so.

While students, faculty, and staff did their best to adjust to the circumstances, this unprecedented turn of events caused inevitable disruption to teaching, learning, and assessment. In July, the three of us, as campus assessment leaders, conducted a study of how these events affected assessment across our campus, IUPUI. We also attempted to discern why certain academic and co-curricular units were able to continue with all or some of their planned assessment activities when others were not, and identified several lessons learned and recommendations for sustaining assessment in rapidly changing circumstances.

In this article, we summarize what we have learned so far.

Background

IUPUI is Indiana's leading urban public university and premier health sciences center. Home to more than 27,000 students and 2,800 faculty, 17 degree-granting schools and two colleges, the campus serves as headquarters of the nation's largest schools of medicine and nursing, and site of Indiana's only dental school. Since 1992, the university has annually hosted the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, the nation's largest and oldest higher edu-

To gain insight into the impact of the pandemic on assessment efforts across the institution, we surveyed members of our Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC), an approximately 50-member group of faculty and administrative assessment leaders from all IUPUI academic and most co-curricular units.



cation event focused on assessment. The campus prides itself on its cutting-edge assessment efforts, which have earned us a number of national recognitions and awards, including, most recently, the Sustained Excellence in Assessment Designation, conferred in 2016.

The shift to remote instruction in spring 2020 was especially challenging for IUPUI, given the number and variety of university programs with clinical and field work components and our mission-driven commitment to serving our neighboring urban communities and beyond. As we write this, knowing much more than we did at the pandemic's outset, many students have returned to campus for the fall semester amid extensive safety measures. A majority of courses will continue

to be taught remotely or in hybrid formats throughout the current semester. Those staff who can work from home are continuing to do so to minimize campus density.

Methods

To gain insight into the impact of the pandemic on assessment efforts across the institution, we surveyed members of our Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC), an approximately 50-member group of faculty and administrative assessment leaders from all IUPUI academic and most co-curricular units. PRAC oversees comprehensive periodic

reviews of academic programs and administrative offices and, through monthly meetings and subcommittees, provides a forum for campuswide collaboration and exchange of assessment information and strategies. We also sent the survey to a few non-PRAC colleagues involved with assessment. We received 25 responses, which we followed up with several in-depth interviews. It is from these sources, as well as our own perspectives from our different vantage points within the institution, that we derived the insights discussed in this article.

Results

More than 75% of PRAC respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic and unexpected move to remote

instruction had affected their assessment activities. While a few said that their programs made a smooth transition to remote instruction and assessment, many others reported that mastering the mechanics of remote teaching and curriculum delivery demanded their complete attention. Other respondents fell somewhere between these extremes, noting that some, but not all, assessment activities were completed; that the switch to online interaction made assessment activities requiring student engagement more difficult; or that they were able to move assessment activities online, but only by adjusting the activities. For example, IUPUI's Herron School of Art and Design emphasizes one-to-one mentoring and feedback to students; conducting assessment remotely meant these activities occurred virtually and, often, faculty relied on images of student work rather than the work itself.

Co-curricular programs and high-impact practices (HIPs), which typically involve hands-on learning, faced special challenges—among them that students engaged in these activities in ways faculty and staff had not assessed before. For example, the Division of Student Affairs had to determine “how to assess student learning and development gained through virtual programs and services” as well as how to “evaluate the effectiveness of these virtual programs and services.” A HIP assessment leader in another division observed that “reflection and purposeful interaction ... were somewhat limited without in-person contact.”

Upfront attention to embedding assessment into curricula helped at least one school to minimize disruption of ongoing assessment activities when the pandemic struck. In the Herron School of Art and Design, an associate dean embedded rubrics for recently adopted disciplinary outcomes into each capstone syllabus and course site in Canvas, our learning management system (LMS). This effort represented considerable work for the associate dean, as it meant going into Canvas sites for several courses—but it did enable faculty to easily fill out the rubric for every student and for the associate dean to

go back into course sites later and harvest assessment data. At the capstone level, where students had complete bodies of work spanning several years, faculty were asked at semester's end for observations about strengths and weaknesses across the groups of graduating seniors they had taught. Additionally, the school surveyed all faculty about learning outcomes for students at every level. While not all assessment activities were completed—for instance, reviews of student work by a second faculty member—faculty overall “learned as much as usual” about student achievement.

Occasionally, the move to remote learning led to improvements in assessment. In IUPUI's Life-Health Sciences Internship (LHSI) Program, for example, students are funded to work with faculty mentors on a research project over an academic year. During the year, students develop an ePortfolio wherein they document their internship experiences and reflect on what they are learning and how the experience is contributing to their professional development. They also meet periodically to share experiences, work on their ePortfolios, and prepare for the program's annual spring showcase event, where interns share posters focused on their research projects and findings.

In past years, internship mentors did not see students' ePortfolios; rather, the LHSI Program director reviewed them to gather assessment data and provide feedback to the students. But in spring 2020, the LHSI Program hosted a virtual showcase on the LHSI website, where students' ePortfolios, which incorporated their posters, were displayed (<https://sites.google.com/iu.edu/elweek2020/life-health-sciences-internship-program>), and asked faculty mentors for their evaluations.

The results were striking: Comments from faculty mentors indicated that they were surprised by how much student interns were learning, by interns' ability to reflect on and articulate that learning, and by their sharp observations of workplace culture and their own work styles. The ePortfolios offered the mentors feedback

on interns' experiences that they had not received before, enabling them to make warranted changes for future interns. Moreover, sharing their ePortfolios publicly helped interns develop a sense of community, compensating, in part, for their inability to meet face to face. Now the LHSI Program plans to continue having students share their ePortfolios online with their mentors and one another in future years.

Similarly, IUPUI's Institute for Engaged Learning created a virtual forum, where viewers could examine posters, ePortfolios, and other creative and reflective pieces of student work emerging from a variety of engaged learning experiences: internships, civic and community engagement, undergraduate research and creative activities, honors projects, first-year seminars, capstone experiences, and more. The virtual showcase (<https://sites.google.com/iu.edu/elweek2020>) was so well received that the institute plans to continue it beyond the duration of the pandemic.

Lessons Learned

As the pandemic continues and we move forward with plans for the fall semester, we need to build on what we learned last spring about teaching, learning, and assessment in rapidly changing circumstances. From this study, we were able to glean several lessons and recommendations:

1. Communication: Effectively conveying information is crucial to managing student expectations. Timely and clear communication regarding attendance, participation, and other issues is essential.

2. Time: A thoughtful adaptation from face-to-face to remote/online learning requires us to commit time to (re)conceptualizing and implementing modifications to instruction and assessment. Effectiveness in a virtual environment challenges instructors and program directors to explore existing technologies or learn new ones.

3. Flexibility: Barriers many students routinely face—such as job loss, family responsibilities, and food insecurity—intensify during a pandemic. Online learning

(continued on page 15)

Bicentennial, Interrupted: IUPUI's Pandemic Year 1

(continued from page 7)

offers increased opportunities to be flexible, attend to issues of equity, and seek solutions when students cannot meet deadlines.

4. Some things can be better online:

Virtual small group sessions can be productive and more inclusive than in-person discussions. Online showcases can be powerful means of highlighting and disseminating final student work.

Recommendations

1. Embrace the complexity: Virtual environments offer instructors opportunities to enhance assignments. For instance, in a video production class taught virtually, asking students to use their phones offers them new problem-solving opportunities: How do I stabilize my phone without a tripod? How do I get good sound without a microphone?

2. Discuss time management: Acknowledge that time management and breaking work up into manageable parts can be more difficult for students learning remotely or living in settings with different time demands and distractions. Be mindful of sharing deadlines and dividing large projects into smaller assignments, and (again) be clear with students about expectations. IUPUI students have appreciated well-designed Canvas modules with explicit expectations built in.

3. Embrace asynchronous and smaller touchpoints: While many students are comfortable learning online, they do not necessarily want to stare at Zoom for an hour. Incorporating smaller environments, whether one-on-one interaction or small-group work, can be powerful (as it often is in face-to-face teaching and learning). Supplement these sessions with periodic full-class meetings. This approach allows for more asynchronous learning and exploits the flexibility online experiences offer.

4. Embed assessment early and often: Incorporating assessments and rubrics into both the syllabus and the LMS will eliminate substantial work at the end of the semester and make it easier to aggregate findings at semester's or year's end.

5. Periodically ask students to reflect on their learning: With solid scaffolding and thoughtful prompts, even brief in-class reflections can enhance student learning and support assessment efforts. A mathematics student can verbalize the steps she took to solve a word problem. A student in a writing class can reflect on how he went about conceptualizing the organization and logic of an essay or steps he took to revise and improve a first draft. Students can be asked to explain key disciplinary theories or concepts in their own words. Instructors can also query students on

their experiences with remote and online learning and how those learning experiences can be enhanced. Such reflections can demonstrate and deepen disciplinary learning and reveal areas where students are struggling, providing actionable information for improvement.

6. Be kind and listen: Trauma and grief have increased significantly for many students, especially those from underrepresented groups. Ask students frequently for their perspectives and reflections on how their learning experiences can be improved.

With uncertainty looming over the current academic year, we begin IU's third century on a more somber, but also a more determined, note. We hope colleagues at the institutions represented in this issue and beyond will take to heart the lessons learned over the past year and continue to seek strategies for improving remote and distance teaching, learning, and assessment—and for remaining flexible and prepared for sudden shifts of circumstance. We owe our students and our other stakeholders no less. ■

Thomas W. Hahn is the director of research and assessment in the Institute for Engaged Learning, Susan Kahn is the director of planning and institutional improvement initiatives, and Caleb J. Keith is the director of institutional effectiveness and survey research at IUPUI.

Resilient Assessment During COVID-19

(continued from page 2)

The steering group members considered options for gathering data, examined surveys developed by vendors and professional organizations, and discussed survey administration opportunities as survey fatigue and low response rates are challenges for our campus. The group decided that locally developed online surveys, one for students and one for faculty, would be most appropriate and sought input from campus partners,

including Keep Teaching, the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Graduate School. Group members developed the student and faculty surveys and completed the Institutional Review Board review. In addition, the steering group members chose to develop and add items to two existing campus surveys. We asked graduating students about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their

employment or continuing education plans, and we asked incoming students about the impact of COVID-19 on their college plans and their experiences with remote learning.

Survey Findings

The steering group shared the survey results in a communitywide presentation. Faculty, staff, student affairs professionals, and administrators used the survey results to plan student-focused programs and services, facilitate faculty workshops to meet the needs of a remote learning