

The End of the High Stakes Exam

How Peer Learning Makes Formative Assessment Possible

18 April 2022: The recent World Economic Forum article [4 Trends that will Shape the Future of Higher Education](#) spoke to the superiority of formative assessment over the high stakes exam. Few educators or students would disagree. It's been known for decades that high stakes exams only measure a specific type of rote knowledge and are strongly biased against 1st generation college students or students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. We've seen many universities do away with standardized tests for admission, but the high stakes mid-term and final somehow survives as the most common assessment model in most disciplines. At a time when a college education should offer a gateway to more equal lifetime opportunity, the greatest predictor of college success continues to be one's zip code.

True formative assessment offers students multiple pathways to express what they know, and generates the formative feedback essential for performance improvement. The emphasis is on learning and growth rather than memorization and fixed results. Assessment becomes a seamless part of the learning journey, contributing to rather than interfering with classroom and career success.

The cost impact of the high stakes assessment isn't just felt by the student. The poor record of 1st year college success, high dropout rates, and untold millions who pass on higher education altogether because they're unconvinced the risk of non-completion is worth the cost, all have a real impact on each school's bottom line. This leads to a downward spiral of budget cutbacks that increase course enrollment size and rob instructors of the very resources they need to adopt high-impact, formative assessment learning models.

Everyone may be in agreement that formative assessment is essential for learning, but how can instructors under severe time and resource constraints possibly offer it? The answer is peer learning. Modern peer assessment solutions offer the same or better validity and reliability of assessment than by a single instructor, with powerful benefits for the learner.

- actively engages students in review of artifacts submitted by their classmates, allowing them to view different approaches and internalize performance standards in ways they could never possibly do in more passive learning models. "Students love the opportunity to see in their peer's work successful models, things to emulate, strategies they hadn't yet considered." *Dr. Christian Schunn, Professor of Psychology & Learning Science, University of Pittsburgh.*
- supports active learning assignments like writing, presentations, projects, coding, video submission, group activities, etc.
- builds foundational skills like critical thinking, communication, and collaboration to better prepare students for success in the workplace.
- generates rubric-based learning data so instructors can personalize instruction and quickly identify students in need of early intervention.
- offers instructors great flexibility. Many instructors use peer assessment for 100% of the first level assessment and then use the learning data provided to assess only those students or submissions requiring their attention. Instructional resources are used much more efficiently.

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Equity will never be achieved in higher ed as long as the high stakes exam is the primary assessment tool across so many subject areas. Peer learning today offers a much better solution: formative assessment that offers all students equal opportunity for success with a much higher level of learner engagement and actionable data.

Contact info@peerceptiv.com to learn more about how peer learning supports learning equity and improvement.