

Doña Ana Community College Assessment Committee Newsletter

Our objective is to support and showcase effective and meaningful academic and institutional assessment.



DACC's Avanza

Dr. Jennifer Hodges, & Kathryn Million

The goal of DACC's Avanza program is to support all DACC students' access to the necessary resources to succeed in the classroom and in their personal lives. To do this, Avanza has a Student Success Advocate at every DACC Campus, ensuring accessibility to students whenever and wherever they need assistance. Basic needs services include the Comfort Casita Food Pantry and Micro-Casita Food Bags, Emergency Aid, the Career Closet, and the Technology Loaner Program. In addition to Basic Needs Services, Avanza provides financial wellness courses, wellness spaces, and referrals to other DACC and community resources.

The top three most utilized Avanza services are the Comfort Casita Food Pantry/Micro-Casita Food Bags, Emergency Aid, and the Technology Loaner Program. Although Basic Needs Services focuses on students' immediate needs, providing for these needs also impacts student outcomes such as persistence and graduation. In Spring 2024, 476 DACC degree-seeking students took advantage of at least one Basic Needs Service. Of those students, 67% had a positive outcome of either continuing their enrollment at DACC, NMSU, or another institution in Fall 2024 or completing a credential at DACC at the end of Spring or Summer 2024.

The Basic Needs grant that funds the Comfort Casita Food Pantry will end in December 2025, requiring local funding to sustain these efforts. As an NMSU employee, you can contribute through payroll deduction by selecting "DACC Food Pantry" at mypayrollgift.nmsu.edu (must be on campus or connected to a VPN). Your support can help ensure students continue to have access to essential resources that promote their academic success and well-being.

Number of students receiving at least 1 Basic Needs Service in Spring 2024

Cohort Size	Still Enrolled at DACC Fall 2024	Completed DACC Credential	Transfer Outside of the NMSU System	Enrolled at NMSU Fall 2024	Did not Complete a Credential and not Enrolled Fall 2024
476	218	42	2	55	159

Compassionate Pedagogy

Dr. Sean Kardar, *Science Faculty*

The 2024-2025 DACC Works theme was Compassionate Learning: Supporting Growth, Engagement, and Confidence. After reflecting, Compassionate Pedagogy should be highlighted to support the mindsets of college staff and faculty in considering and carrying out this theme. The pedagogical approach relies on each tenet of this year's theme to support growth, promote engagement, and inspire confidence. Methodology exists throughout all aspects of life to support accomplishing goals, and how we interact with learners is no different. Pedagogical practices to transfer knowledge are researched, practiced, and modified to fit co-curricular activity and learner assistance, individual instructor, instruction level, and instruction topic.

The practice of caring in education, however, is often overlooked or not fully acknowledged. Compassionate Pedagogy reminds educators and those involved in teaching to recognize that education, like all aspects of life, is inherently imperfect. Although this imperfection has many facets, the humanness of learners and instructors contributes.

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General Assessment at DACC

Activities vs Assessments

Kathryn Million, *Early Childhood Education Faculty* & Dr. Erik Lewis, *Humanities Faculty*

Have you ever wondered about the difference between activities and performance-based assessments in a course? Some instructors start by designing activities to engage students, while others focus on assessments to measure learning. According to the QM 7th Edition Rubric (Simunich, 2024), a strong course includes both activities and assessments, each serving a unique purpose for students' overall learning experience.

Activities are low-stakes opportunities for students to practice skills, engage with content, and receive feedback before being formally evaluated. Activities such as discussion boards, self-check quizzes, or interactive case studies help students build confidence and refine their understanding without the pressure of a high-stakes grade.

Assessments, on the other hand, measure student learning by demonstrating whether students have achieved specific course outcomes. Ideally, these include authentic assessments, such as portfolios, case studies, or real-world projects, which allow students to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways. Because these often look like activities, it's important to distinguish them: activities provide practice, while assessments evaluate learning. Traditional assessments like exams and essays also have their place, but without opportunities for scaffolded practice, students may struggle to demonstrate what they have learned.

A well-designed course ensures students have the opportunity to practice before they perform. If students go straight to an assessment without practice, they're being tested on their ability to guess or memorize rather than their ability to learn. Thoughtful activities bridge that gap, leading to better outcomes and more engaged learners. So, when reviewing your backward planned course map, ask: Are students getting enough practice before they're assessed? If not, it's time to rethink the balance!

DACC Program Focus

Approaches to Assessment

Natalie Streander, *Film & Digital Media Arts Faculty*

Dr. Michael Brown teaches various courses covering critical game studies, 3D modeling, animation, and industry-standard software. Students gain hands-on experience with tools like ZBrush, a leading 3D sculpting tool, and Unreal Engine 5, which powers over 70% of modern games. Now, with the latest addition of a cutting-edge motion capture lab, DACC's Film and Digital Media program is pushing the boundaries of animation and interactivity.

The new motion capture lab at Cholla Hall represents a significant leap forward for DACC's game design curriculum. "This system is truly remarkable," said Dr. Brown. This facility places DACC ahead of many other game and animation programs nationwide, providing students with direct experience using technology found in top-tier studios. By working in an environment that mirrors industry standards, students graduate with invaluable skills, making them highly competitive in the job market. The addition of the motion capture lab provides advanced training in direct-to-game-engine capture.

Looking ahead, Dr. Brown envisions continued growth for the program, ensuring that students stay at the forefront of technological advancements in the industry. With dedicated faculty like Dr. Brown and innovative resources like the motion capture lab, DACC continues to provide students with the tools to thrive in an evolving digital landscape.



Timothy Bell,
DACC, FDMA Student

Literature Reviews on Assessment

Bonnie Rinkels, *Dental Hygiene Faculty*

When I began teaching, rubrics felt unfamiliar and not yet fully understood. I didn't fully grasp their value in guiding instruction or supporting student learning. Over time, however, I've realized how powerful they are—setting clear expectations, improving grading consistency, and helping students take ownership of their learning. This literature review explores the importance of rubrics in education, highlighting their role in enhancing assessment practices and promoting student success.

Rubrics are assessment tools that outline expectations and describe performance levels for a given task. They convey instructional goals to students and stakeholders, offering a clear picture of what high-quality work looks like. By applying criteria aligned with academic and industry standards, rubrics promote consistency in grading and build trust. For students, rubrics clarify assignment components and help students understand both their strengths and areas for growth. They also encourage self-assessment, assisting students to conceptualize learning targets and monitor progress. Well-designed rubrics support critical thinking and improve skills by focusing feedback on specific criteria to avoid arbitrary grades. Rubrics provide insight into how well students meet learning outcomes at the course and program levels. Review the peer-reviewed articles below to benefit your instructional use and refinement of rubric creation.

Olson and Krysiak (2021) emphasize, rubrics are not just assessment tools, they are powerful guides for teaching and learning. The article by Mphahlele (2022) adds meaningful insight into how rubrics and peer assessment influence student learning, especially in an online context. Educators are encouraged to embrace rubrics—not just as grading tools, but as powerful instruments for guiding and transforming student learning.

Olson, J. & Krysiak, R. (2021). *Rubrics as Tools for Effective Assessment of Student Learning and Program Quality*.

Walden University, USA.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7653-3.ch010

Mphahlele, L. (2022). *Students' Perception of the Use of a Rubric and Peer Reviews in an Online Learning Environment*.

Journal of Risk and Financial Management, 15(11), 503.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm15110503>

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Compassionate Pedagogy

Dr. Sean Kardar, *Science Faculty*

The learner's personality who registered for the course is not always the learner's personality that appears in class or engages with assignments. Keep the rigor to excel learners, but also realize that the learning curve of knowing what to do and how to accomplish results is also a learning process. Let's not forget that textbook learning and understanding of how to achieve success are all ongoing in the context of 'life', inherently riddled with barriers and anxiety. To counterbalance, practice Compassionate Pedagogy to promote student well-being, flourishing, and fostering holistic learner development.