Retesting: Helpful Remediation or Academic Crutch?

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• identify what has been learned

• identify areas of weakness

• assure minimum competence before continuing to next level of instruction

• assure fitness to practice safely

• provide a measurement of faculty effectiveness

• data for program assessment and accreditation standards

• other?
Why do students fail exams?

➢ Inability to master content
  • Mistakes in admission

➢ lack of preparation
  • poor attendance, incomplete assignments, poor study skills, time management, failure to ask for help/use resources

➢ lack of motivation
  • inability to see importance/value of exams

➢ personal stressors
  • family, work, “bad day”

➢ failure of faculty
  • delivery, organization, appropriateness of exams
Review of Literature:

➢ Often the same students perform poorly throughout the curriculum
  • didactic performance → clinical performance
  • (Gonnella, 2004; Hojat, 1993)

➢ Poor performing students more likely to have difficulty with licensing exams
  • (Hojat, 1993; Challis, 1999)

➢ Poor performing students tend to become poor clinicians
  • (Papadakis et. al, 2005; Hojat, 1993)
Exams are high stakes

- required level of mastery
- failure may jeopardize progression in program
- failure may jeopardize entry into profession
- failure may jeopardize future career
• Re-testing Policies are Exceedingly Common
  • Even Harvard Medical School!
  • Policies that govern when and how to retest are diverse

• NCCPA allows up to 6 retakes on PANCE
  (within 6 years of completing PAP)

• USMLE allows 4 attempts for each step exam
  (within a 12 month period)
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<th><strong>Pros of Retesting</strong></th>
<th><strong>Cons of Retesting</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Taking a test is part of the learning experience.</td>
<td>The main goal of assessment is evaluating one’s knowledge</td>
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<td>We want students to reach their full potential</td>
<td>If students put in effort the first time, they meet their full potential</td>
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<td>The goal of assessment is mastery of the material.</td>
<td>If we allow multiple re-tests, the grades are no longer a way to differentiate between excellent and mediocre students.</td>
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<td>Allows students to get tutoring between the tests</td>
<td>Allows students to be slackers on the first test</td>
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<td>Students can “work the system”</td>
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<td>In the “real-world” you can look up anything. There is no reason to memorize anymore.</td>
<td>Testing assesses synthesis and application, not just facts. In the “real world” there is not always 2nd chances</td>
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<td>Allows identification of weakness of instruction (focus of responsibility on the professor)</td>
<td>More work for the professor to write new exams. Students need to study correctly the first time (focus of responsibility on student)</td>
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<td>Allows more time for synthesis of current material</td>
<td>Takes away instruction time for new material</td>
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<td>Everyone has an occasional bad day (illness, anxiety, personal problem)</td>
<td>It is the students’ responsibility to share struggles before the test</td>
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<td>Tests are not meant to be a punishment</td>
<td>Rewards those who studied appropriately for the first time</td>
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<td>Students need positive reinforcement. A really bad grade makes them feel like it’s impossible to get out of the hole.</td>
<td>Student who prepare properly generally do well on tests and have good self-esteem regarding knowledge.</td>
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Re-testing best practices

• Should not use the same exact test

• Same material, different questions, leads to mastery not memorization
Options for Retesting

• Allow students to research and explain the correct answers to for partial credit

• Additional written assignment or project

• Oral, short answer, or essay based exam many learners struggle with multiple choice may not adequately reflect knowledge
Breakout Topics

• Frequency and format of retesting options

• Experiences with retesting and remediation

• Impact of retesting policies on student performance
Rutgers Data on Retesting

PANCE Pass rate
2013. 96%
2014. 98%
2015. 100%
2016. NA
Retesting Not the Only Solution

- Poor performing students often progress in curriculum with little guidance or intervention
- Concerns often not recorded or addressed
- Students believe their study skills are fine
- Externalize reasons for their failure
- Continue with same techniques or strategies to study
- Fear of asking for help
  - “black mark”
A Different Way of Thinking

• More of the same knowledge, skills teaching continue until success on a required retake

VS

• Cognitive and metacognitive approach learning to learn self-regulation and reflection improve strategies for success
Recommendations for Faculty

• Actively facilitate learning
  ⭐ faculty development encouraged

• Provide constructive feedback
  ⭐ prompt, detailed, expected, nonjudgmental

• Foster a culture where asking for help is considered positive

• Make resources known and fully available
Recommendations for Faculty

• Explore self-regulated learning processes

• Learning to Learn rather than Exam Coaching
  - cognitive and metacognitive processes
  - learner-centered
  - academic and emotional support
  - collaborative learning
  - reflection
  - peer support
References

Thank you!

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