

Portfolios and Capstone Courses

Lori E. Shaw
University of Dayton School of Law

Among the most effective institutional assessment tools are those already embedded in your students' course work. Why burden students and faculty with add-on assessments when you can easily repurpose existing tools? And since students take assignments more seriously in the context of a class, embedded tools often provide the most reliable measure of student learning. This session focuses on a great source of embedded assessments, the capstone course, and a new way to look at embedded assessments, the portfolio.

Capstone courses, which usually are taken in the final year, provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to apply the substantive knowledge and practical skills acquired during their time in law school to real legal problems. Students might be asked to represent a simulated client in a complex litigation or prepare an estate plan. Multiple assessments are embedded in the typical capstone, and there is no richer source of information about your soon-to-be graduates' learning. During this session, you will be asked to ponder what skills, knowledge, and values are already being measured in your school's capstone courses and how you might use those measures to evaluate the efficacy of your educational program as a whole.

The creation of a portfolio involves the systematic collection of a student's work during her time in a specific course or course series or in law school. It allows you to measure student learning longitudinally to see the "value added" by your educational program. During this session, we will explore how your school might use portfolios as an assessment tool.