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CLOSING THE LOOP: THE USE OF A CURRICULAR DATABASE TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE WITHOUT COMPROMISING EXAM SECURITY

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Introduction

At the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, there is ever-increasing recognition that the development of high-quality medical student examinations is a fundamental part of a high-quality educational experience. As growing faculty time is spent in the development of reliable exams, question banks and the reuse of testing items are both becoming more prevalent. Security of these examinations is thus increasingly becoming a priority. However, our faculty also recognizes the importance of student feedback. In past years, we have allowed students directly access to their tests following the examination sessions, but the increasing importance of exam security obviously conflicts with this approach. The authors and course directors are attempting to resolve this dilemma by utilizing a curricular database to provide students with individualized feedback while maintaining exam security.

Methods

The database utilizes a standardized nomenclature to track curricular data. In 2005, this nomenclature was applied to exam questions for the mid-term and final examinations in a multi-disciplinary course offered to second-year medical students. The course was chosen based upon the large amount of faculty time and expertise devoted to high-level exam development. Exam content, course content, and class demographics remained unchanged from previous years. Following both the mid-term and the final course examinations, each student was provided a detailed report containing the content of each question, utilizing the standardized nomenclature, and the student's performance on each question. In addition, a comprehensive report was provided to the course chair regarding the correlation of course emphases with aggregate student performance.

Results/Discussion

The results of this pilot project were mixed. The block chair appreciated the ability to provide feedback to students without having to release exam material. Students, not surprisingly, would have preferred to view the exam material directly. They also indicated that it would have been more helpful to have reports using the standardized nomenclature to detail course objectives. Class performance remained unchanged from previous years. In cooperation with course chairs, the authors plan on implementing this approach in future courses with improved reporting of course objectives and enhanced methods of evaluating student satisfaction.