

Sticking with the Outcomes: Using Sticky Notes to Assess Student Learning in a Literature Course

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Author Biography

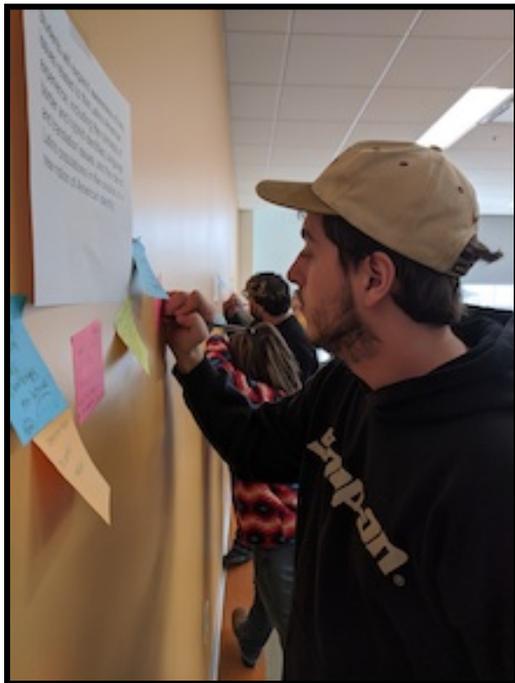
Jessica Lindberg, PhD Poetry, started working at Georgia Highlands College as an English tutor in 2002. She now serves as the Humanities Division Chair covering English and Spanish.

On the last day of our sophomore-level Latino/a Literature class, students entered the room prepared to sit passively and have me tell them exactly what would be on the final exam. Instead, I wanted them to take ownership of connections they had made between works of literature, global perspectives, writing, and research skills. I wanted them to have an “a-ha” moment about how much they had learned during the course.

In order to do this, I printed out the learning objectives listed in the course syllabus and taped these to the walls around our classroom. Each student had to identify a work of literature, theme, or assignment they saw as directly connected to each one of the objectives. They tagged their contributions with sticky notes (Post-It Notes®). While physically moving through the classroom space, students began remembering and revisiting the concepts we had covered throughout the term. Thus, our last day of class became a metacognitive exercise as well as a student-guided study session for the final exam.

Uncomplicated Setup

To set up the room, I printed out the five learning objectives from our syllabus and taped them the walls.



As students entered the room, I gave them stacks of sticky notes, inviting every student to take up to ten notes. They had to walk around the room, read the learning outcomes, and post something they learned from the class that aligned with that objective. They could post up to ten notes, and every note also earned them one point toward their Class Activities grade. This means they could erase/replace a zero on a quiz grade with these ten points. They were eager to take part.

To provide an additional challenge, I would not let them repeat or reword notes that were already posted by their classmates on any of the objectives. They had to dig deep to create original responses.

Observations

As students moved around the room, they became invested in remembering lessons and activities. Their impromptu group discussions as they huddled near the outcomes drew connections between themes and ideas. The activity solidified some of the concepts and major themes of the course. I heard several comments along the lines of “oh yeah, I forgot about that!” During the activity, they seemed to

become nostalgic for the class days we spent in deep discussion of writers and texts. I had no preconceived notion of what they might come up with for their sticky notes. Reading their comments, I saw a much

deeper and more interwoven connection of material, texts, themes, and concepts than a simple test answer or assessment survey would have provided.

Sticky Notes: What They Wrote

With twenty-eight students in the class, and each student aiming to write ten sticky notes to earn a full ten points, the classroom walls quickly turned into color-blocked patterns of thought. A few examples of what students wrote below each learning objective are listed below:

1. Students will place works of literature in their historical and cultural contexts.

*I learned about the term “borderlands” & its importance within the context of the literature.
I learned about the impact Caesar Chavez had on society.*

2. Students will identify literary styles and social issues in the work of prominent authors associated with the time period covered in the course.

*I learned about the Latinx struggle through different perspectives in the stories and poems.
I learned about the lasting impact of the poem “Yo Soy Joaquín” in the Chicano Civil Rights movement.
I learned about the Nuyorican Poet’s Café and its importance for Puerto Rican New Yorkers.*

3. Students will synthesize information in standard English to support ideas or arguments as they examine literary works.

*I learned how to break down a story by Judith Ortiz Cofer and see how that story related to the experience of second-generation immigrants.
I wrote about how often children are the narrators in Latino Literature and what that says about the future.*

4. Students will evaluate or make inferences about information, arguments, or observations.

I learned that you can’t always trust the translation. You have to ask who is translating, and what their motivations are.

5. Students will demonstrate effective use of appropriate literary terminology.

*I learned the term “linguistic terrorism.”
I learned the term “diaspora.”
My favorite new word is “Loisaida,” which is what Nuyoricans called the Lower East Side.*

Reflection

Assessing learning objectives in a meaningful, measurable way is a challenge in any discipline. During this activity, I witnessed students connect ideas and engage in conversations akin to what takes place among professional critics and writers. Interacting in this way also brought the learning objectives back out of the neglected tomb of the syllabus, a document that students often forget after the first day of class.

This activity is not limited to literary studies; it would be a useful exercise in an American History class to encourage students to move beyond a simple recall of facts. In an Organic Chemistry class, this exercise could be used at the end of chapters or units for students to judge their mastery of the information. In short, the activity manages to unify the course structure and design with the course content in a way that makes learning *stick*.