Project Summary

Title: Assessment of Student Performance and Results of the Criminal Justice Comprehensive Exams

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Students of criminal justice at Kutztown University are required to take the comprehensive essay examination in order to graduate with a B.S. degree. The comprehensive essay examination serves a number of interrelated purposes, including the evaluation of students’ knowledge of the criminal justice discipline, critical thinking abilities, writing skills, and significance of a liberal arts education. Although passing the comprehensive exam is a graduation requirement, many students do not take it seriously, as it is evident from the results of recent exams.

The purpose of this project was to assess how serious students are about the comprehensive essay exam and how much effort they are putting into it. The study also looks into the factors that may contribute to a successful exam performance. This study was conducted among the 62 students who took the comprehensive exams between spring 2008 and spring 2009.

Our findings indicate that majority of the respondents took the exam seriously or very seriously. In terms of factors contributing to the success in the exams, data indicate that those prone to study for an exam tended to study for all components on the comprehensive and to also perform well. Moreover, this was especially clear for Exam 2 where amount of study was related to success. In addition, use of the comprehensive exam study guide was an important variable. Finally, the findings from this project have resulted in changing the comprehensive examination to one where important student learning outcomes are assessed through course-embedded assessments.

A full report of the project is available from the Principal Investigators.