



## Assessment for Rapid Pedagogical Improvement (ARPI) Showcase



# Amber Ruszkowski

Ivy Tech Community College, South Bend-IN

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## Context

Amber Ruszkowski is a department chair & associate professor in the School of Business at Ivy Tech Community College, South Bend-IN. The college is a public comprehensive 2-year college in Indiana, enrolling more than 120,000 students throughout the state. Mrs. Ruszkowski supervises faculty who teach Business courses and she teaches several business courses to predominantly white students. These courses are designed to establish a foundation for the career technical pathways into Business industry with opportunities to gain certifications and an associate degree.

In the Introduction to Business course, Mrs. Ruszkowski stated that this is a high-volume gateway course into the Business Administration program. This course could be used as a General Education course and can also support the Accounting and Information Technology programs in the freshman year of each of these programs of study. The most important opportunity for students is the Introduction to Business course as their first exposure to the field of study. The goal of this introductory course is exposure to all the nuances and different concepts that are in the field of Business Administration.

In this course, students begin to think about the area of this profession they would like to gravitate to within Business Administration. Some students really love Human Resources, Management and/or Marketing. The primary goal of this course is to provide exposure to the field, foundational level of understanding and increase the opportunity for successful course outcomes in their program. The point of this course is to get students excited about their entry into the field as a career or if a working adult, increase their skills that would impact their career trajectory.

## Assessment Strategies for Rapid Improvement

Mrs. Ruszkowski implements pre-and post-assessments in this course. The instructors take a look at a student's beginning knowledge around a specific set of questions and examine their early understanding of the course material. The pre-assessment questions inform the instructors' teaching practices around the specific course material that requires more coverage in the course. At the end of the course, a post-assessment is provided to determine how well instructors have taught the learning objectives. In addition, the instructors use formative and summative assessments such as writing assignments. These writing assignments can be low-stake assessment writing assignments that students can practice refining their APA skills while integrating course concepts. These assignments are scaffolded into a larger, more summative assignment that integrates some components of metacognition.

Mrs. Ruszkowski stated *"We ask the students to do self-reflection about their learning and focus on specific concepts that were discussed in their final paper. What is the 'why' of the concepts selected?"* Mrs. Ruszkowski believes that the three assessment practices of pre- and post-assessment, formative and summative assessment, and self-reflection address many of the elements of meeting diverse students. She advises that it is very important to have the students do a "check in" which is a way in which the instructors can become aware of where students are at in their class and how comfortable they are with the course material. In addition, instructors are adjusting their teaching methods to serve all students within a diverse population.

One of the major changes in this course is implementing the ePortfolio. Mrs. Ruskowski advised that opening the ePortfolio assignment for students to place their diverse assignments in, receive feedback and reflect on their own learning is vital to formative assessment. With their ePortfolio, students can add whatever they want to include for their leadership and management power point presentations. Students can select which assignments they want to upload to the ePortfolio to showcase their own learning.

Mrs. Ruskowski advised that she has her faculty review the CANVAS gradebook to determine if their students are performing below 70%. If they are performing below 70%, faculty must notify her and provide some details as to what is being done to move the student's formative assessment scores higher. Discussion conducted by faculty with students determine the confounding factors that are impeding their success, such as a death in the family, being laid off from a job, work schedule changes, and other factors that would prevent them from doing well in their courses. In addition, Mrs. Ruskowski advised that the faculty is looking on an ongoing basis at core success rates as it relates to students who receive a "ABC" versus "DFW" as their final course grade. These course success rates usually align with student retention rates and are viewed as global completion rates. For Ivy Tech Community College, the course success rates are extremely important from the institutional level analysis of assessment by course each semester.

Mrs. Ruskowski advised that the department looks at the scores on the specific Signature Assignments and the corresponding rubric to determine what are the reasons for non-performance and attempt to isolate the issue and correct the problem. Any grade under 70% which would be an A, B, or C, would be reviewed to determine why students were less likely to achieve over 70% as a grade. She stated, *"We are taking a look at the actual assignment, language, directions, how things are set up, and determining if the rubric does not effectively assess what we're looking for the students to take away from the assignment."* If they cannot determine these aspects of the assignment, Mrs. Ruskowski looks at the course content to determine if a redesign of the specific assignment is necessary.

## Pedagogical Interventions

Mrs. Ruskowski examines best practices in teaching methods, course methodology, or poaches the course structure based on other faculty members' methodologies. Many faculty members come to her for coaching on their teaching methods. Mrs. Ruskowski advised that after redesigning the Introduction to Business course, there had been several faculty members that have come to her for assistance with their course redesign. She added that students don't fail because they are poor test takers. There are multiple opportunities in low stake assignments that the students have an opportunity to see how well they are doing as a formative assessment of their work.

Mrs. Ruskowski believes that the formative assessments are key to student achievement in her courses. She anchors her teaching methods in andragogy (adult learning) rather than pedagogy (child learning). Since they are not teaching children, andragogy is more reputable for teaching adults there at the community college. There are special considerations that have be made to successfully reach the students that they serve and being fully versed on all the tenants of andragogy and the application of those principles. Andragogy has informed her approach to course redesign, redevelopment, and student outcomes.

Mrs. Ruszkowski teaches her course face-to-face and hybrid with online lectures. The improvement that she made in teaching and assessment can be categorized into two types: rapid and sustained changes.

The **rapid changes** happen in response to the formative assessment methods during the class time which revealed a particular area of learning gap or confusion. Mrs. Ruszkowski provides intricate teacher responses to students that assist students with correcting their thought process in understanding the course materials.

The **sustained changes** happen when the course is completed and Mrs. Ruszkowski would go back and review questions to better align with the discussion and short-term questions. She would take additional time to systematically analyze the question results, understand better where students struggle, and identify the parts of the lecture and teaching materials can be improved, incorporate additional readings or resources into the syllabi or course materials for the next semester, sustaining the improvement made in the current semester to the next semester.

Examples that Mrs. Ruszkowski provided for the sustained changes include:

- Scaffolding learning through multiple short assignments throughout the semester so that she can give students prompt feedback.
- Using the formative assessment and group activities for rapid improvement of pedagogy. For example, using results of the pre- and post-assessment results of the classroom time to reteach materials that the students struggled with.
- During the formative assessment activities, solicit feedback from students on the assessment methods and the outcomes of their completion of these assessments.
- Self-reflection of teaching methodology to improve her teaching skills in preparation for the next semester.

Mrs. Ruszkowski observed markable improvement in student learning through a heavy reliance on the rubric which includes a five-point Likert Scale. The assessment points are 4=Exemplary, 3=Proficient, 2=Developing, 1=Beginning and 0=Not Evident. Mrs. Ruszkowski advised that in the initial review of the students' progress using the rubric, less than 20% were receiving a "3" or higher rubric score. She advised that this meant they were far from their success rate goal of 70% performing at a "3" or higher on the rubric, which was their target goal. In the first year of using this assessment rubric, Mrs. Ruszkowski advised that the Business, Accounting, and Information Technology divisions conducted some strong review of the data and worked on designing future formative assessments. This change made a significant impact on students' assessment scores moving forward.

Mrs. Ruszkowski advised that she relies heavily on the students' feedback in their self-reflection. Self-reflection appears to be one of the major formative assessments used for students to participate in their own learning with minimal teaching necessary for movement towards achievement. These smaller low stake writing assignments that allow students to practice and refine their APA skills while integrating course concepts and then scaffolding into the larger summative assessments have benefited the students' learning. The self-reflection final assignment allows students to review the course concepts and this supports metacognitive thought development as well as strong continuous formative assessment.

## Equity Considerations

Mrs. Ruszkowski advised that her student population was predominantly white. Her formative and summative assessment practices were implemented within a cultural context to include minority student populations. The use of the three assessment practices which are pre- and post-assessments, formative and summative assessments, and self-reflection are key to understanding where her students are as they matriculate into her Introduction to Business course. Mrs. Ruszkowski asked, *“Are we meeting the students where they are with the knowledge that they have and what do they know?”* This benefits students with learning challenges as the faculty are required to adjust their teaching methodology based on the student responses.

Mrs. Ruszkowski advised that they are very cognizant about using a diverse batch of case studies and scenarios to be more culturally relevant to a broad audience. Some of our feedback from employer partners is that our students were really lacking a lot of experience around diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism. This was an opportunity to have students conduct more exploratory work and present some different scenarios that they had experienced in an environment such as a classroom that was safe enough to explore and practice.

Mrs. Ruszkowski advised *“It is really important to allow spaces in the classroom to discuss quotes, unquoting, dumb, or racist type of statements to be expressed and addressed”* and this improves equity in the classroom experience. Furthermore, she advised that this is incredibly rich education where students can learn from each other and acknowledge different experiences. This allows for some time and space for this type of sharing that is important to the education of students, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics or experiences that makes us different.

Mrs. Ruszkowski discussed that their DFW rates went down significantly after redeveloping the Introduction to Business course. She advised that the prior course was not developed with setting up student success. There were a lot of assignments, students were overwhelmed, the assignments were not found to be meaningful, and it did not support student learning. With the redeveloped course, the DFW rates went down immediately upon implementation and this course was within the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile for course success rates within the first semester from 75-76%. She advised the faculty that the redesign of the course had impacted the student success rates in the gateway courses. Students were blossoming, confident, and had a little bit more foundation that assisted them with all their college courses.

## Personal and Institutional Factors to Effect Change

At the personal level, Mrs. Ruszkowski stated that her changes in the Introduction to Business course was based on an internal attribute related to being an educational leader. She stated that anyone that has a heart for teaching is concerned with developing people to their highest and best potential. This is her teaching philosophy and it comes from developing people to their highest and best potential. It is evident that this will look different for everyone and this is the part that makes teaching so much fun. Mrs. Ruszkowski states, *“It’s about leadership. It’s about doing the right thing by our students.”*

Mrs. Ruszkowski stated that it was important to address adult learning, anchoring it on andragogy, and understanding the importance and differences between pedagogy and andragogy. She advised that we are teaching adults and not children which requires us to serve students differently than what we have been taught to do. Considerations that must be made in order to successfully reach the students that we serve and to be fully versed on all of the tenants of andragogy and the application of those principles.

Mrs. Ruszkowski stated that faculty must question their own work and interrogate it while looking honestly and plainly at their andragogy. She advised *“This is not an attack against you and whether you are an effective teacher or not, teachers must look at it through a different lens and question what we are doing.”* Mrs. Ruszkowski reflected on her being at Ivy Tech Community College for 14 years and seeing a variety of students with their concerns, things that they bring to the classroom, and how they show up was important to understand to teach in a way to develop them. For instance, her online and face-to-face teaching mirror each other because there are transferable and applicable learning environments that personalize the class which makes it more approachable to students.

Mrs. Ruszkowski determined that it was important to redevelop the Introduction to Business courses to ensure that rapid improvement prior to pedagogy was of the top priority. It was difficult to sit and complete this audacious task because she did not have the time to do it however, she knew that realistically she must demonstrate the redesign and redevelopment of the course so that her faculty could be inspired to review their courses. This is an institutional challenge.

As for institutional processes, Mrs. Ruszkowski advised that Ivy Tech Community College does provide funding for professional development, travelling, and association memberships. Mrs. Ruszkowski looks for memberships that allow her to present and to learn such as the American Association of Learning in Higher Education. Understanding the importance of administration, teaching, and learning is very important to her role as a department chair.

## Takeaways

- It takes time to redesign courses to reflect authentic formative and summative assessment. These activities around rapid improvement can be difficult in the initial revisions of the courses however, the iterative process gets easier.
- Do not shy away from social justice. Bring up some topics in the classroom that broach social justice work in the classroom. This is an opportunity for a holistic learning environment through social justice topic discussion in the course.
- Don't be afraid to fail. You can learn more when you fail. If you win, you win and can share these attributes with your peers. However, sharing your failures with peers allows you to open up to their approach in considering something different. The results show your hard work and the work that your students have done. Be proud of this. It is important to show the growth of you and your students.