Certification-Equipped Education Programs: A Vision to Elevate Performance

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Key Points
- The purpose of assessment is to USE the results to IMPROVE student learning.
- Certification-embedded curriculum is one assessment methodology that can be used to elevate the performance of the student, the curriculum and the program.
- Students can distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive marketplace, demonstrating to employers they have attained a new level of knowledge or a specific skill set.
- The information gained through the process can be used as an assessment cycle "closing-the-loop" activity to improve the curriculum and student learning.
- External credentialing demonstrates to accrediting bodies that students are achieving learning goals and gaining competencies.
- The process is easily adaptable to other types of certifying exams in a variety of content areas.

Introduction
Our educational institution partnered with the Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA) to provide students a significantly discounted membership and access to the Certified Healthcare Financial Professional (CHFP) learning materials and exam. The CHFP is recognized for its ability to provide a comprehensive review of the HFMA material and a course grade that is used to determine the HFMA exam score.

Module I - HFMA Business of Health Care® online program
Module II - Operational Excellence

Students are required to work through Module I - Business of Health Care® materials and take the related exam. Students who pass the Module I exam are encouraged to take the Module II exam to obtain the CHFP certification. The exam results and student feedback are used as a closing-the-loop activity to improve the curriculum and student learning.

Continuous Improvement of Student Learning
Good assessment follows an intentional and reflective process of design, implementation, evaluation, and revision, relying on four simple but dynamic words to represent this process:
- Plan: What do we want students to learn?
- Do: How do we teach effectively?
- Check: Are learning outcomes being met?
- Act: How do we use what we have learned to improve student learning?

Planning
HFMA’s Business of Health Care® - Module I of the CHFP
Classroom curriculum is developed by focusing and expanding upon the Module I HFMA’s Business of Health Care® content areas of:

Course 1: Healthcare Finance – The “Big Picture”
- Overview of the U.S. Healthcare System
- Financing the Healthcare System
- Changes Intended to Reform the U.S. Healthcare System
- The Role of Financial Management in Healthcare Organizations

Course 2: Financial Accounting Concepts
- Basic Accounting Principles
- Key Financial Statements
- Analysis of Financial Statements

Course 3: Cost Analysis Principles
- Types of Costs and Cost Behavior
- Cost Finding and Cost Allocation
- Setting Prices
- BreakEven Analysis

Course 4: Strategic Financial Issues
- Basics of Strategic Planning
- Basic Budgeting Concepts
- Elements of the Budget for a Healthcare Business
- Budget Variance Analysis
- Controlling Operations using Rate and Volume Variance
- Other Guidance for Strategic Financial Management

Course 5: Managing Financial Resources
- Paying Physicians and Hospitals for Services
- Billing and Collection Process in Healthcare
- Compliance
- Working Capital Management
- Other Financial Resources

Course 6: Looking to the Future
- Pricing Models of Payment
- Consumerism in Healthcare
- The Need for Business Intelligence and Analytics in Healthcare
- Aligning Clinicians and Finance Professionals to Drive Value
- Population Health Management

Doing
Students independently work through the Module I material corresponding to classroom content in the areas of healthcare finance, risk mitigation, evolving payment models, healthcare accounting and cost analysis, strategic finance, and managing financial resources.

Class curriculum provides a deeper dive into each of the above content areas and the HFMA material replaces a course textbook. Content quizzes after each HFMA course reinforce the material and help prepare students for the Module I exam.

As the course final exam students are required to take the Module I - Business of Health Care® exam. The exam is comprised of 75 multiple choice questions which must be complete in one 90 minutes sitting. A passing score is 70% and there is a mandatory 30-day waiting period to re-take the exam if not passed on the first attempt.

To encourage students to take exam preparation seriously, they receive a scaled assignment grade (worth 20% of overall course grade) based on their Module I - Business of Health Care® exam score as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HFMA Exam Grade</th>
<th>Assignment Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90% - 100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% - 89%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70% - 79%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;70%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Checking
The exam diagnostic results and student reflections are used as a closing-the-loop activity.

After the fall iteration, greater content coverage was placed on value-based payment models and providing more opportunities for multiple choice question practice.

After the spring iteration, the online course curriculum will be further modified to hold student more accountable for the timely completion of the HFMA content material, to provide more discussion of proper exam preparation techniques and to offer a voluntary practice exam.

Conclusion
Certification-embedded curriculum is a “win-win” for learners and educators, elevating the performance of the students and the program. Students can differentiate themselves by indicating to employers they have business acumen. For educators, the results can be used to improve curricula and demonstrate to accrediting bodies that student are achieving learning goals and gaining competencies.