

PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT (PBA)



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COURSE:

LABORATORY IN IMMUNOLOGY

(MIMM 385)

SUMMARY

Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) promotes the development of discipline-specific “soft skills,” such as properly using equipment and communicating respectfully with peers. In this course, students have multiple opportunities to practice skills that are relevant to both the course and future work environments. Students complete three PBAs throughout the term, receiving detailed feedback and comments on each one.

“We’re telling students that we value these skills. We’re putting time and energy into assessing them, and we want students to improve.”

- Claire Trottier

GOALS

- Make students aware of discipline-specific “soft skills”
- Give students opportunities to practice discipline-specific skills that they will use throughout their careers
- Provide feedback on elements of the learning experience that do not usually factor into assessments

STEPS

- 1 Students receive detailed instructions about the PBAs and have the opportunity to ask questions about the assessment method.
- 2 Teaching Assistants (TAs) observe students as they engage in laboratory activities, and they collect any materials necessary for assessment (e.g., lab notebooks).
- 3 TAs assess students' performance and return rubrics with comments.
- 4 TAs lead discussions about the PBA, answering any questions that students have.

ASSESSMENT

Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) accounts for 8% of the final grade. Each of the three PBAs throughout the term has increasing weight, according to the following schema:

- First PBA (1%) assesses laboratory practices
- Second PBA (3%) assesses teamwork and self-regulation skills
- Third PBA (4%) assesses all relevant skills

Students receive [numerical and written feedback](#) after each assessment.

READY TO TRY IT OUT?

HERE'S SOME ADVICE ...

- Think about compatibility between learning outcomes and assessment strategies. Ask yourself: "Are there any important skills that I would like students to leave the course with but am not currently assessing?"
- Schedule PBAs throughout the semester so that students have the opportunity to act on feedback and practice their skills.
- Keep the stakes low so that students can focus on improving their skills rather than simply getting a "good" grade.
- Consider replacing a general participation grade with a PBA.

BENEFITS

- Students recognize the value of soft skills, and instructors know whether students are gaining skills that are fundamental to the discipline.
- Students receive detailed feedback that prompts reflection on strengths and areas for improvement.
- PBA creates a dialogue between instructors/TAs and students about the value of developing soft skills.

CHALLENGES

Providing students with meaningful feedback takes time. Feasibility may depend on the number of students in the class and availability of TA support. With TA support, instructors need to train TAs to provide students with detailed and useful feedback. Without TA support, instructors may opt for fewer PBAs or provide students with less detailed feedback.

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